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EDITORIAL

As I write this editorial (on December 15), the **MARVEL PREVIEW '93** won't be out for nearly a month. When you *read* this editorial, that magazine will have been on the stands for weeks. And, as of this writing, there are *already* corrections to be made.

For example, after the **PREVIEW** was sent to the separator, we decided that each of the 1993 annuals would have a special trading card, a "rookie" card, spotlighting the new super character introduced in that 80 page annual. It goes back to the philosophy Mark Gruenwald expressed in the **PREVIEW**, "We're still trying to hearken back to the days when every annual was a special event." And to make sure that comic shop floors wouldn't be littered with loose cards, we decided the annuals would have to be poly-bagged.

And there will be **PREVIEW** corrections. For example, **GHOST RIDER, SPIDER-MAN, SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE, WARLOCK AND THE INFINITY WATCH,** and **WOLVERINE** were listed at a $2.00 cover price, but those titles are remaining at $1.75.

With the **PREVIEW** on the stands, I'm sure more corrections will be spotted. Even though we went through an extensive review procedure to make sure our information was correct, things change and evolve. And that's the reason for **MARVEL AGE** — to keep you abreast of events on a monthly basis. We're Marvel's answer to **CNN.**

In addition, **MARVEL AGE** is the place you send any letters concerning the **PREVIEW.** If you've spotted something that raises a question, or if you just want to tell us what a wonderful job we did, we want to hear from you (particularly in the latter case). Updates and answers to your questions will appear right here, particularly in the editorial and the "Up Front" sections.

One thing will become obvious the entire time — 1993's the year to watch.

—Steve Saffel

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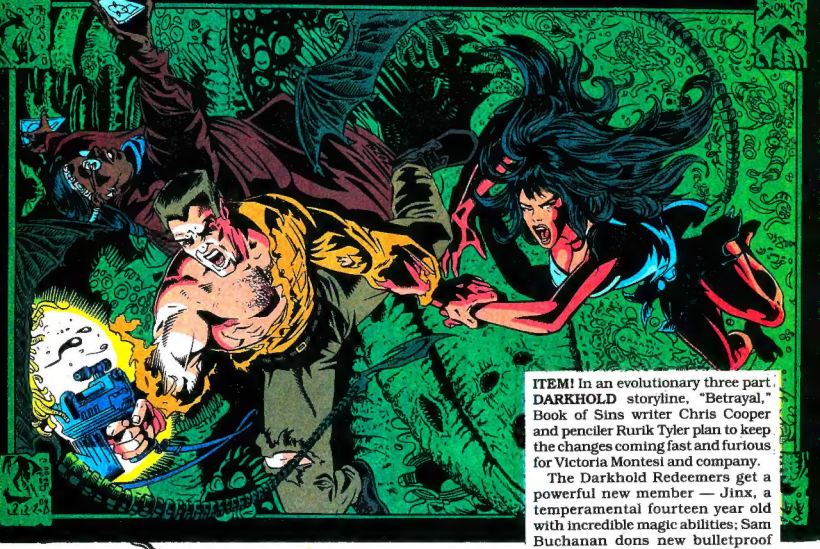
Up Front

ITEM! Each year at two imposing downtown New York City buildings known as the Toy Center, every manufacturer, distributor, importer, exporter and retailer of every toy manufactured in the world come together for one week to an event called the Toy Fair. The Fair is a place to show, demonstrate, explain, advertise and simply play with every new toy available.

At this year's Fair, running February 8-16, Marvel will be well-represented with a wide variety of new, licensed toys — crafts and activities, pinball games, shooting galleries, mini-diecast vehicles, View Masters, Wolverine flashlights, and, of course, action figures. These toys are referred to as "licensed" because Marvel does not actually produce them. Marvel licenses the right to other manufacturers to make the toys. The action figures, for example, are manufactured by Toy Biz.

For 1993, Toy Biz introduces 21 proposed new action figures, 15 of which will actually make it to market. All heroes and villains from the X-Men books, these new figures include Wolverine, Strong Guy, Bishop, Omega Red, Apocalypse, Gatling, two different versions of Cable, Kane (Weapon X), Sunspot, Grizzly, Cannonball, Cyclops, Professor X, Longshot, Ahab, the Brood, Sabertooth and Maverick. These characters were picked to be toys based on their prominence in the FOX animated TV series, their popularity in the comics, and their visual impact.

Ultimately, what makes Marvel licensed toys unique is what Alan Gordon, Marvel Vice-President of Toys and Games, calls "the kick butt look." As Alan explained, "When you look at a Marvel comic or character, it isn't nice and pleasant. It's powerful, it's heroic. A Marvel toy should be the same way — it isn't soft and cuddly, it kicks butt!"



ITEM! In an evolutionary three part, **DARKHOLD** storyline, "Betrayal," Book of Sins writer Chris Cooper and penciler Rurik Tyler plan to keep the changes coming fast and furious for Victoria Montesi and company.

The Darkhold Redeemers get a powerful new member — Jinx, a temperamental fourteen year old with incredible magic abilities; Sam Buchanan dons new bulletproof armor; a major new villainess is introduced — the demonic Diabolique; and a significant plot twist occurs in which one of the Redeemers turns on the others and betrays them to the evil Darkholders.

According to Editor Hildy Mesnik, the transitional nature of "Betrayal" makes it a good place for new fans to pick up on what this book is all about, and just in time, too, as the events lead directly into the June Midnight Sons crossover, "Midnight Massacre."

ITEM! The **X-MEN UNLIMITED #1** illustrates perfectly why Marvel decided to call its quarterly shipping books "unlimited." Unlimited by length and content constraints, writer Scott Lobdell (**UNCANNY X-MEN**) and penciler Chris Bachalo (**HULK #400**) utilize the entire 64 page, premiere issue to present one decidedly different story.

While flying to the Savage Land, the Blackbird jet containing Professor X, Cyclops, and Storm is sabotaged by Siena Blaze of the Upstarts, andcrashes in the frozen Antarctica wasteland. Injured and with no relief in sight, Cyclops and Storm must carry their severly wounded mentor across the barren tundra to find help. But against the raw ferocity of the elements and the rage of Siena Blaze, even the mutants' incredible powers aren't enough — they must use all of their skills and knowledge to survive.

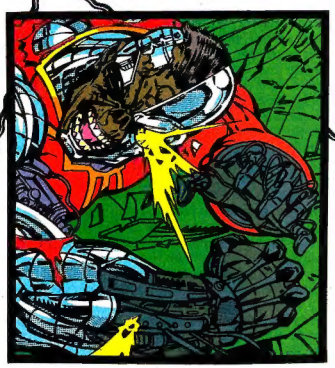
For more information on the new series, check out the mutant feature in the **MARVEL PREVIEW '93** and this April, as **X-MEN UNLIMITED #1** is released, **MARVEL AGE #125** will offer a special update on upcoming X-plans for '93.

ITEM! USAgent, a superhero so obnoxious he is disliked by nearly every other hero in the Marvel Universe, gets the chance to charm his critics in the four part US AGENT limited series beginning in March. Written by USAgent creator Mark Gruenwald (**CAPTAIN AMERICA, QUASAR**) and penciled by M.C. Wyman (**DAREDEVIL**), it features USAgent uncovering the ring of professional assassins known as the Scourge, battling their deadliest killer, Bloodstain, and bringing the ring to justice. But, according to Editor Nel Yomtov, the most thought-provoking aspect of the series lies in the sub plot.

"In the story," Nel elaborated, "USAgent befriends Reverend River Nordstram, a religious man who helps him realize there's a spiritual side to life, a greater purpose than to just beat people up. The series has a lot of great action but, like any good limited series, the character development is just as strong. What fans will walk away with is that the Agent has moved along, he's matured, he's no longer a jerk."

ANNUALS UPDATE

All of Marvel's 1993 annuals will share the common theme of introducing a major new character, and each annual is planned to be entirely self-contained. To properly introduce this onslaught of unknown heroes and villains, each of the annuals will come polybagged with a trading card of the character complete with power ratings and biography. More details on the annuals can be found in the **MARVEL AGE 1993 PREVIEW**, on sale now.



ITEM! DEATHLOK #25 will be, "a real corker," promised Editor Tom Brevoort. This conclusion to the four part "Panther's Legacy" storyline celebrates Deathlok's anniversary with 48 pages and a holografix foil cover. Written by Dwayne McDuffie and penciled by regular **DEATHLOK** artist Walter McDaniel, the explosive story includes the invasion of Wakanda by the all new Moses Magnum, a no-holds-barred battle royal between Deathlok and Magnum, and a revelation about Deathlok so major that Tom refused to divulge it.

Available next month, **DEATHLOK #25** salutes two years of quality and heralds the arrival of many more to come.

– Matt Morra

Mark's REMARKS

I've been told that there are three subjects to avoid in polite company: sex, politics, and religion. Though I consider all of you, my gentle readers, polite company, this month I'm going to tackle one of those subjects. . . religion. Kind of.

The Marvel Universe is an amazing place. Among the many extraordinary phenomena is the unequivocable existence of gods — not just one god, but many gods, in fact, all gods from every culture and religion, past and present — Norse, Greek, Egyptian, Hindu, Celtic, etc. All of these gods are physically real in the Marvel Universe, not just symbolically or spiritually or metaphorically real.

There's an inherent problem in this for those who take their particular god very seriously. In the real world (that's here), most religions teach the uniqueness of their belief systems — not just the sovereignty, but the exclusivity of their god; not so much "You shall put no other gods before me," as "There are no other gods except for me." The paradox of the Marvel Universe, then, is that while everybody's notion of god is right and true, no god (or belief system) is true to the exclusion of all others.

If I may be allowed to express a little pet peeve of mine, I'd like to say that it fills me with chagrin to get letters from readers who disagree with a comic character's beliefs or with the mythological underpinnings of a story set in the Marvel Universe. News flash, folks: it's a free world and characters can espouse whatever beliefs they have, and the Marvel Universe is a fictional construct, one that need not conform to a given reader's idea of the real universe. People who confuse comic reality with real world reality, and expect it to conform to their belief systems, probably should not be reading fiction. Thank you for this indulgence.

So just what are gods, anyway? God in the singular is the supreme being of a reality, the creator and ruler of the whole universe. Certain belief systems feature a singular god, sometimes with multiple aspects or faces, and allow that god support troops of various lesser supernatural creatures. Gods in the plural are epitomes of various human virtues. Gods in the plural are beings of superhuman or supernatural power who are worshiped by lesser, mortal beings. This may be something these gods seek out or something that is thrust upon them without their solicitation.

The Marvel Universe, as we've said, is a multiple god universe. If someone (character or reader) chooses to believe in a single God in the Marvel Universe, s/he must demote all of the other beings of power to the status of mere demigods. I am not saying it is foolhardy for a person in the Marvel Universe to believe in a single god — anyone is entitled to whatever belief one wants — that person simply has to either ignore all the other gods or create a personal cosmology in which these beings fall somewhere between one's self and the supreme being.

Marvel's abstract entities like Eternity and Infinity, who represent great big hunks of reality, make no claims to being gods. So if one is trying to piece together a personal cosmology, they must be taken in account as well.

Is worship or belief an essential trait of a god? Is the god who has the most worshippers the most powerful? Well, I can't speak for the real world, of course, but in the Marvel Universe, there was a story in a 1970's **THOR ANNUAL** that posited that the Norse and Greek gods' power was dependent upon belief, that their very life forces were somehow psychically linked to humanity's hearts and minds, and thus they waned in power as soon

as they left the area where they had worshippers. Subsequent tales have shown this story to be apocryphal or false. In the Marvel Universe, the gods are objectively real, and while some of them may have some enchantment that ties their powers to the beliefs of others, this is not a function of their godhood. In fact, an ungodly character like Dormammu, who has never claimed to be a god, has cast a spell that links his personal power to the psyches of his worshippers.

Besides gods, there are beings of great power who, if they stuck around mortals long enough and performed a few great feats of power, would probably be worshiped as gods themselves. These are guys like the Silver Surfer, the Stranger, Galactus, and the High Evolutionary. What are the differences between guys like these and gods like Hercules, Thor, Leir, and Horus? Certainly not power level. It seems to be place or method of origin.

Most of the gods worshiped on Earth in the Marvel Universe were said (in a later **THOR ANNUAL** which has not been discredited) to have derived in some way from Earth's mystical-biospherical energy. Super-aliens and evolved humans, of course, do not fit this criterion.

Then we have the Celestials, huge and mysterious alien beings, born not of this earth, not spiritual beings in any way though worshiped as gods on some planets, who have sufficient power to make the gods of Earth stand up and take notice. Taking these guys into consideration only makes the construction of a personal Marvel Universe cosmology that much more difficult. It's a good thing that your average M.U. citizen isn't aware of too many of these gods (except for Thor and Hercules), and s/he probably doubts that these two are the same individuals s/he read about in mythology books.

Writing gods credibly is more difficult than writing human beings credibly. It would be very difficult if most of the gods of the Marvel Universe didn't have so many human traits, but fortunately they do. However, because of their great power and longevity, their perspective of time and sense of purpose must be vastly different from a human being's. Very few stories do more than merely touch upon these issues, dwelling instead on the actions of these beings. But let us exercise our imaginations for a moment and think what it would be like.

If centuries seemed like mere years to us, how would we feel about friendships with mere mortals, who would age and die in what seemed like a matter of months? Would we become inured to this dismal certainty, or refuse to associate with mortals? If we had the power to do anything we wanted, what would we decide to do? What if we had spent a few centuries learning all the earthly languages, a few more playing all the musical instruments, some more seeing every single corner of the planet, a few decades amassing a personal fortune, another few governing great numbers of people — after we had done it all and had it all, what would we still find worthwhile?

Would we devote our time to helping people? What would be the point — they're going to die anyway? Would we devote our time to lording it over people? What would be the point — how big a challenge could that be? Would we devote our time to learning for its own sake? Art for its own sake? Pleasure for its own sake? If you had all the time in the world, what would you find to do to make that time seem well-spent?

Gods are cool. They enable us mere mortals to stretch our imaginations, picture ourselves fulfilling the outer limit of our potentials. Gods are instructive. They help us mere mortals understand aspects of the universe in a metaphorical way. Gods are inspirational. They can show us mere mortals how to be better, more heroic, more noble mere mortals. And the Marvel Universe, the largest, most cohesive fictional universe in all literature, has the greatest array of gods in all the world. Suspend your real world religious beliefs and have a ball.

- Mark Gruenwald

Marvel readers are about to find themselves thunderstruck.

Eric Masterson's over-the-top run as Thor has inspired a spin-off, colorfully entitled **THUNDERSTRIKE**. And while the new launch marks the close of the fantastically chaotic Thor-as-Eric/Eric-as-Thor era, both thunderers will soon discover their walk on the wild side has only just begun.

Slated to debut in April, **THUNDERSTRIKE** boasts not only the original book's rich tradition, but also its most recent creative team, as Marvel's Editor in Chief Tom DeFalco and Ron Frenz accompany the character they developed during their five year partnership as writer and artist on **THE MIGHTY THOR**. Also making the shift to the new standard format title are inker Al Milgrom, colorist Mike Rockwitz, and Editor Ralph Macchio, who takes on the additional mantle of Avengers (and thus Thor) group editor.

"Usually, when you spin off a character, the creative team stays with the original title," DeFalco said, pointing to the uniqueness of the **THUNDERSTRIKE** kickoff. "I think the reason the whole (Eric Masterson) crew is switching over is because we've been having so much fun. We just want to continue the party."

Lining up **THUNDERSTRIKE's** creative principals, it turns out, was the easy part. Hammering out the fine points of the way Eric should be handled in a book all his own was a trickier issue. Ultimately, Frenz said, all involved opted to "take something that still looked base-level Thor and change it more than we ever would if it were Thor, or if it were Eric as Thor. And we decided to ground it a little more in Marvel New York City and run with it. So there's going to be a slightly different tone."

This should be readily apparent in a visual sense, as in his first "solo" issue Eric sheds his costume's regal Asgardian features, accenting the stripped-down version with an open leather vest and severe, slicked-back ponytail. His new hammer, given to him as a gift when he parted with Thor (and not so coincidentally dubbed Thunderstrike), is bound to his wrist not by a thong but by a high-durability chain.

The result, Frenz said, is that Eric will now be "a more physical character than Thor — sort of a 20th century Conan.

"When you have a character with the winged helmet and the cloak and all, he seems a little bit detached," he explained. "Of course, we've always had Thor fight hand to hand, but Eric is going to be more pedestrian in the way he interacts."

Thematically, too, **THUNDERSTRIKE** will find Eric and his chroniclers charting new ground. While DeFalco stressed that the mortal thunderer's new adventures will continue to offer no-holds-barred excitement, he said the mood will be tempered by a heightened sense of personal and heroic duty.

"**THOR** was mainly propelled by action," DeFalco said. "In **THUNDERSTRIKE**, we'll have Eric much more involved in personal situations. We're going to start focusing on the emotional angst."

At the same time, apropos of the title, Eric will be thunderstruck by the realization that what was once a stint as a substitute hero has become a lifetime commitment now that he's got a hammer of his own.

"The storyline deals with a real person coming to grips with incredible power," DeFalco said. "Up until now, Eric has kept putting his life on hold, figuring the situation with Thor would soon come to an end. Now he realizes this is his life and it's never going to end. So he can no longer put things on hold — he's got to get it together."

Both writer and artist characterized Eric's struggle to reconcile his roles as hero, mortal man, and father as a "coming of age" process. By the end of his run in THOR, Frenz noted, Eric was already beginning to understand that there is no manual of policy and procedures for being a super hero; at almost any given moment, his counterparts in Asgard, in the Avengers (where he will remain a member), and elsewhere were all just feeling their way. **THUNDERSTRIKE's** theme, Frenz said, "parallels when you get to be an adult and you realize that they never knew anything more than you did. It's that kind of an evolution for Eric."

The hero's new attitude — in short, the **THUNDERSTRIKE** creed — will be summed up by a quote DeFalco and Frenz have borrowed from 18th century British statesman Edmund Burke: "The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is for good men to do nothing." Acting on this stance, Eric will tangle with a veritable cavalcade of villains over his first several issues, most notably the unearthly, Mad-Max-meets-the-Red-Skull menace of Bloodaxe the Executioner. Keeping the plot line's many twists and turns well-guarded, DeFalco would say only that **THUNDERSTRIKE's** double-size premiere will focus on Bloodaxe, with Eric then moving on to face a yet-to-be-revealed roster of new villains and Thor's old Earth-bound foes.

The thunderer's newfound poise stands to play a critical role in these encounters, as Eric continues to struggle with super abilities redefined when he swapped Mjolnir for Thunderstrike. "We're not going to assume that the new weapon does everything that Mjolnir does," Frenz explained. "With Thor it's evolved over the years to a point where he flies by controlling the winds, much like Storm does. We're going to return to the rough-and-tumble concept that you spin the hammer, throw it, and

STRIKE

LIGHTNING STRIKES TWICE

I CAN'T *
FILLING IN FOR THE THUNDER GOD HAS BEEN THE WILDEST ROLLER COASTER RIDE OF MY LIFE!
IT'S FINALLY OVER... NOW THAT DON BLAKE HAS RETURNED!

hang on for dear life."

"There won't be any more shots of Thor soaring over New York, giving him time for soliloquies," he continued. "There will be a lot of takeoff shots and landing shots, but Eric is going to be cannonballing himself across the city."

All the same, this is heady stuff for a character never really envisioned as a stand-alone player when he was first dreamed up by DeFalco and Frenz. Although the pair introduced Eric Masterson with an eye toward **THE MIGHTY THOR #408**, in which Eric was merged with the Thunder God and became his new mortal identity, no one foresaw how quickly this development would snowball.

"When we first had the idea that Thor would be banished and Eric would replace him, the two of us were convinced that we were going to be lynched," DeFalco recalled with a laugh.

In recent months, as the end of the Thunder God's exile became imminent, the Thor team realized that Eric Masterson's popularity was much more than a passing fad, and the concept of a spin-off began to take shape. Initial discussions considered, among other possibilities, featuring Eric in a closely related companion title to be billed as a new **JOURNEY INTO MYSTERY** (the title that originally introduced Thor); eventually, DeFalco, Frenz and company opted to take the hard left embodied by **THUNDERSTRIKE**.

"We had to decide how far afield we wanted to go, and whether it was Eric, or Eric as Thor that we should hang our hat on," Frenz explained. But either way, he added, "even people who vehemently wanted the original Thor back didn't want to lose Eric as part of the cast, which was very flattering and very heartening to us."

"**THUNDERSTRIKE** is essentially a response to the fan response," DeFalco agreed.

Meanwhile, back in Asgard, another promising era is dawning, as **WARLOCK**'s Jim Starlin and **THE SILVER SURFER**'s Ron Marz take over as Thor's new co-writers with issue #460. They'll be joined by penciler Bruce Zick (**THE PIRATES OF DARK WATER**), inker Mike DeCarlo (**IRON MAN**), and Editor Mike Rockwitz as they embark on a year-long story line which is at once a return to Thor's roots and another radical departure.

Tapping very deliberately into the trauma of Thor's lengthy imprisonment in the psyche of Eric Masterson, Starlin and Marz plan to bring to light what it means to a god to have his soul tampered with. What's more, they argue, the problem is cumulative, tracing all the way back to Odin's creation of the Don Blake persona to teach his son humility.

"All through his history, Thor has had some sort of stigma attached to him," Marz said. "There's a certain bit of his individuality that's always been taken away from him."

"The way Jim and I looked at it was that all this would leave you with a rather confused character, especially after this latest bout where he was completely submerged into a mortal being," he continued. "Our take on it is that the guy doesn't come out of it with both feet on the ground."

As Starlin pointedly summed it up, "Thor's going insane."

The writers are mapping out this descent into madness as something of a geometric progression, with only the vaguest hint of Thor's troubles offered at the outset.

"When our first issue opens, Thor is pretty much the same character readers have known all these years, just a bit more morose than usual," Marz said. By the story's end, however, Thor has called off his planned marriage to Sif, instigated a drunken tavern brawl, and been ordered by Odin "to get out of town and get himself together."

Enter a new Valkyrie of dark allure and even darker intent, who gradually fans Thor's feelings of confusion and malaise into an inferno of rage. Increasingly unhinged, the Thunder God clashes violently with Beta Ray Bill, recruited by Sif to restore Thor's sense of reason; faltering still further, he takes on some of his counterparts from Greek mythology; and eventually, the beleaguered hero becomes a thrall of the Goddess, a fanatical manifestation of Adam Warlock's good half who serves as the focal point for the upcoming **INFINITY CRUSADE** limited series.

Long recognized as a master of the cosmic action saga, Starlin is crafting these galactic-scale developments as a series of opportunities for Thor to cut loose, breathing new life into the brand of heavens-shaking sequences which helped establish the character.

"Basically, it's going to be a lot of rock 'em, sock 'em adventure," Starlin said. "I'm really trying to get Thor back to his old self."

Given this overriding aim within the story line, establishing a new mortal identity for Thor doesn't even rank on Starlin's priority list. ("That's what screwed him up in the first place!") In fact, the Thunder God won't be touching down on Midgard at all in the near future, one of the primary distinctions between **THOR** and **THUNDERSTRIKE**. After two years of what was in a sense a continuous Thor-Eric Masterson crossover, the respective creative teams are keeping their heroes and supporting casts quite separate. (Separate, at least, with the possible exception of Sif, who DeFalco mischievously hinted may not have resolved her briefly-revealed feelings for Eric.)

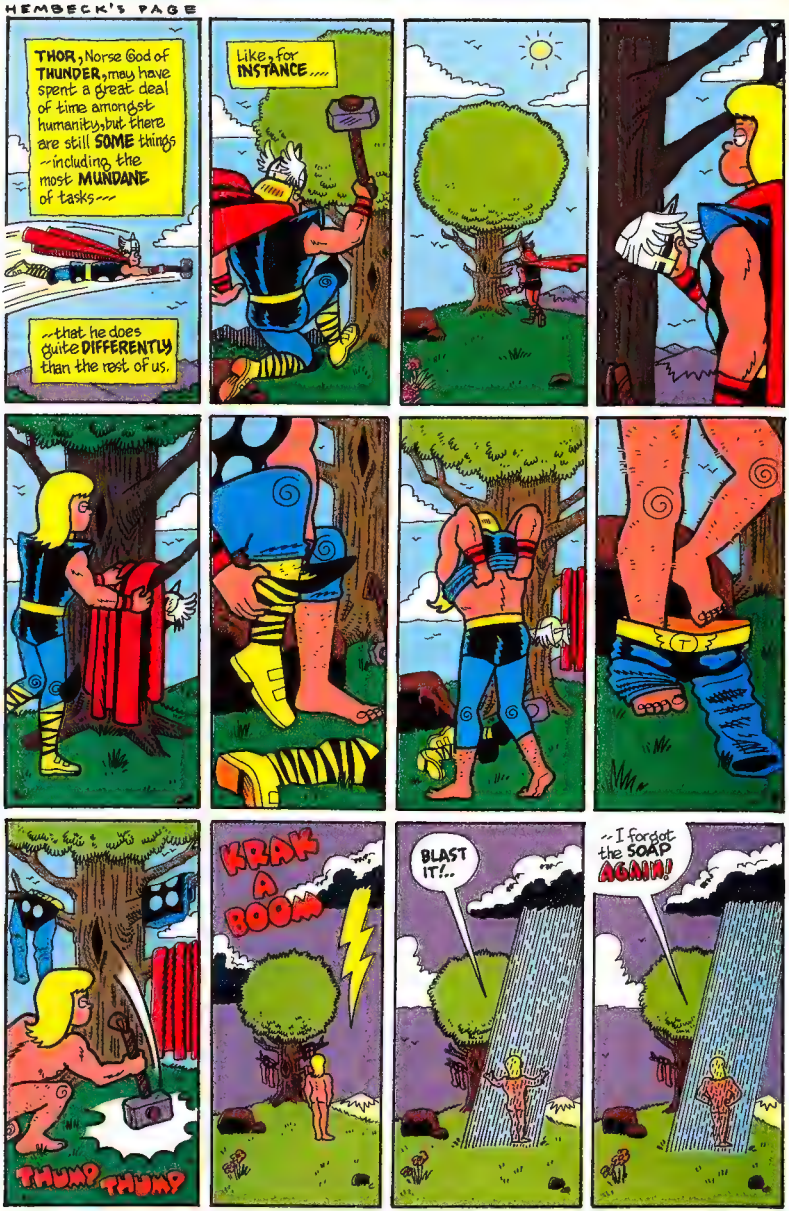
At the conclusion of **THE INFINITY CRUSADE**, the Thunder God will be ushered directly into "Celestial Fugue," a story arc of equally vast scope encompassing multiple issues of **THOR, THE WARLOCK CHRONICLES, WARLOCK AND THE INFINITY WATCH** and **SILVER SURFER**. By this point, Marz noted, "Thor is so far over the edge, he wants to take everybody else with him." It falls to Warlock to act as "the super hero psychologist of the storyline," hunting for the key to curing Thor's insanity while the Silver Surfer applies some much needed muscle.

Guest stars who will also likely slug it out with Thor include Hercules, Wonder Man, and Drax and Destroyer; as Marz pointed out, "With a being as powerful as Thor running amok, it's bound to be noticed by some other people."

Still, the writer added, the strength in numbers principle isn't a panacea. "It's not a question of simply beating Thor into submission — and frankly, that's a chancy proposition at best."

Ironically, with universal catastrophe looming, the bad guys won't be. Readers thinking they'll handily trace the entire crisis back to the Starlin-Marz arena's "conventional" forces of evil had better think again. "You've basically got one villain throughout the piece," Marz said, "and it's Thor."

And so **THOR**, like **THUNDERSTRIKE**, will seek to honor tradition while simultaneously flying in the face of it. Frenz voiced high hopes that fans and creative folks alike will benefit from "best of all possible worlds" philosophy of the two books. "We've got to shake things up for ourselves or we're not going to keep the readers interested," Frenz said, reflecting on the unlikely turns the Thor mythos has taken of late. "When a creative team is having fun, I really think it comes through on the pages. And we're having fun with what comics do best, which is, admittedly, melodrama."


THOR, Norse God of THUNDER, may have spent a great deal of time amongst humanity, but there are still SOME things --including, the most MUNDANE of tasks---
--that he does quite DIFFERENTLY than the rest of us.
Like, for INSTANCE....
THUMP THUMP
KRAK A BOOM
BLAST IT!..
--I forgot the SOAP AGAIN!

stan's SOAP BOX

Hi Heroes,

I don't know about you, but I can't keep up with **THE MIGHTY THOR!**

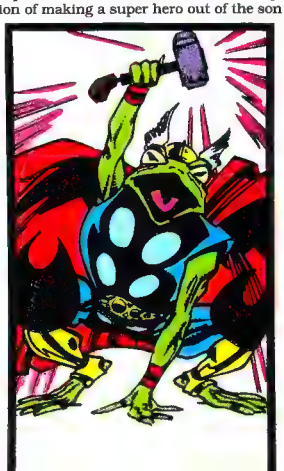
I remember the good ol' days when he was just your average sort of Thunder God. He had his enchanted hammer, his girl friend Sif, his doting dad — who also happened to be the main man of Asgard — and a bunch of friends named Balder, Volstagg, Fandrel and Hogun. Plus, he had his Earthly identity as Dr. Don Blake, a slightly lame, totally dedicated surgeon who had a good thing going with his nurse Jane Foster. I was able to deal with that.

But, after moving to Los Angeles, I lost track of ol' Goldilocks for a while. Later, when I grabbed a few copies in order to catch up on things, I saw that he was a guy with the face of a horse, thanks to the inimitable imagination of Walt Simonson. Okay, that could happen to anyone. Then, after a while, he was the same old Thor again, and I again lost track.

Recently, I picked up some copies and noticed that, courtesy of my ol' pal, Titanic Tom DeFalco, my once clean-cut and Shakespearian-sounding Thunder God seemed to be a bearded tough guy who wouldn't know a suture from a stethoscope! I'm afraid to let another few months go by without checking the mags — I'll probably find our hammer-slammin' immortal turned into one of Barbie's fashion friends!

Okay, I'm sure you know that I'm just kidding! Actually, the various transformations and transmutations Thor has undergone have been exciting, clever, bold and imaginative. The readers have loved them, the Bullpen has loved them, and I applaud the gang for having the courage to come up with such far-out concepts. But, if ever I see the mightiest warrior god of all prancing around in a tutu studying ballet, I'll swear I'll shout, "Verily unto ye I say, **DESIST**, for thou hath truly gone over the shockin' edge!"

People often ask me how we ever came up with the notion of making a super hero out of the son of Odin.



The answer's obvious. Odin didn't have a daughter! (Forgive me — it's been a tough day!) But the real reason we decided to base a super hero strip on a god, or godling, as the case may be, is a simple one. At the time we created Thor (no, that isn't accurate. We didn't create Thor. He'd been part of Norse mythology for centuries. We took the legend and *adapted* it, molded it into our Marvel style image). At the time we came out with our version of Thor, we already published **FANTASTIC FOUR, THE HULK** and **SPIDER-MAN.** We wanted to produce a new title, and our first concern was how to get someone *different?* We already had the strongest mortal on Earth, a man who could stretch, a guy who could burst into flame and fly, and a teenager who swung on webs. What in the name of Irving Forbush could we come up with that would be different?

That's when it hit me! The only one who could surpass the colorful powers those super heroes had would have to be a god! But even then there was a decision to be made. Legendom is packed with gods — Roman, Greek, African, Asian, etc. Well, I always thought the Norse gods were pretty cool, what with their dramatic costumes and horned helmets, their love of battle and their overgod Odin, whose two sons represented the best and the worst of the human condition. As for Thor himself, the reason I zeroed in on him was because of that crazzzzy hammer of his. It would certainly be different than any other hero's weapon, and that was good enough for me. Besides, you'd just have to love a gent with a name like Thor. You can imagine how much ribbing we took about his name and how many puns our readers sent us (ie: "My daddy thpanked me and now I'm thor!") Additionally, we had a built-in villain: Loki, god of evil, who was one of the most powerful baddies of all time. All things considered, way back in '63, Thor seemed like the perfect choice, and history has proven we were right!

Now, before I turn you loose to cross the Rainbow Bridge, be sure to keep your hammer rust-free and wherever you go, whatever you do, always remember "Fas est et ab hoste doceril!"

Excelsior!

Stan

– *Stan Lee*

Cable

The scene is the far future. A small band of the Clan Chosen rebels is pinned down by the military might of the dictatorial New Canaanites. Through the smoke steps the leader of the rebels. Sun glints off of his bionic arm. His cybernetic eye flashes. His name is Cable. He looks left and right, grits his teeth and gives the order for his forces to attack.

So begins the new monthly **CABLE** series that will premiere in March.

"Cable had become a pivotal character in the world of Marvel and especially in the X-Men universe. A lot of the characters in the X-books seemed to be revolving around him. There was so much story to tell about Cable that he was squeezing other characters from their own books, and so we decided that he really needed to have his own series," **X-FORCE** Editor Bob Harras said.

The team chronicling Cable's adventures each month will be writer Fabian Nicieza (pronounced Neesee-AY-suh) and artist Art Thibert (pronounced **TEE**-bear). They will take Cable and his cast of supporting characters from the far future back to the past. Fabian explained that the series will delve into "the man that is Cable."

"In the book, Cable determines what he's going to do and who he is going to be. That choice includes being trapped in the present time (after the first few issues of the new series) so that he can fulfill his mission of keeping the disaster that happened in his present—which is our future—from occurring in any other potential timeline. The only way he can see to do this is to prevent any potential dictator, ruler, or chaosbringer, like Apocalypse has become in Cable's future, from coming to power," Nicieza said.

In order to carry out his mission, Cable will become someone who goes out—and sometimes out of his way—to stop the people that he perceives to be trouble. Some of the people he opposes will be villains, but some will be heroes.

"I think that Cable is a very confused individual. He's basically a good person who's fighting for the right reasons. He just does it the wrong way sometimes," Nicieza said.

The book will have a global breadth and scope dealing with the entire world and matters that pertain to the future. "This series will explore the fact that the X-Men are living at a pivotal time in history. The things that are happening to mutants now will affect history for years to come," Harras said.

FIRST ISSUE'S SPECIAL

The first issue of **CABLE** will have a silver-foil embossed, wrap-around cover that highlights Cable's bionic parts, revealed Marvel Marketing Manager Sven Larsen. The issue is also giant-sized to accommodate the scope of Nicieza's story. "When I handed in the plot for my first issue, Cable didn't appear in it until page 22. So Bob Harras, boy genius that he is, suggested a giant-size issue in order to fit Cable in," Nicieza said.

The CABLE series picks up after the acclaimed "X-Cutioner's Song" storyline. Several months have passed since anyone has seen Cable in the present. Kane (Weapon X) has been trapped in Cable's future for the past ten months, where he has learned a great deal about the man that Cable is. But he is starting to worry that Cable won't return to take him back to our present.

However, Cable does return and when he does Kane finds that Cable has gone through some extremely traumatic experiences. "We won't be revealing what has happened to him right away, though," Nicieza said. "Cable will be sporting a new look at least for the first few issues, but the readers won't know why."

WITH FRIENDS LIKE THESE...

"In the present, people have come to know a Cable [who] is vastly different from the person that Cable *really* is," Nicieza said. "The only person who is discovering this is Kane."

Because of their relationship, Kane will be a very important character in the series. "For all intents and purposes, Cable will become Kane's surrogate father. They're two characters who obviously need each other very much and neither one is willing to admit it. They'll start to realize this more and more as the series continues," Nicieza said.

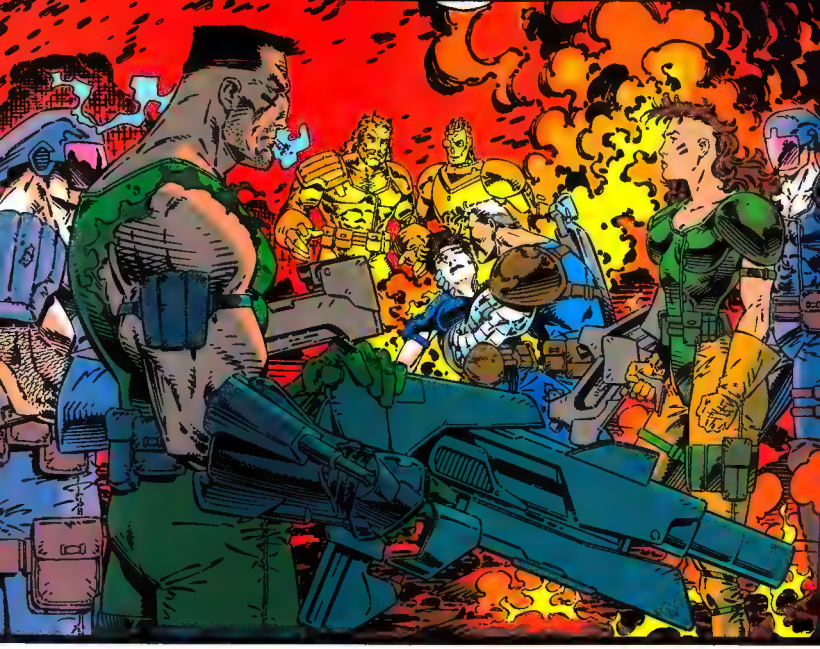
"Kane is living the life that Cable has lived and he doesn't want to make the same mistakes his surrogate father has made. The problem is that even though he recognizes the sins of the father, he is still doomed to repeat them. As a result, there will always be a bit of friction between Cable and Kane, because Kane will constantly be trying to rebel against the very thing that he is."

Six-Pack will be reunited in the series with Domino, G.W. Bridge, Hammer, Kane and Grizzly. The sixth member joining the team is a surprise character who will cause a great deal of conflict within the group. Six-Pack will go on their own missions, sometimes opposing Cable, and sometimes working with him.

"The team doesn't want to work with Cable because they don't trust him anymore, and who can blame them. Writing Six-Pack is great. The fun thing about them is that they're all such lovable curmudgeons. They've been at this for a long time and they're really cynical about the business," Nicieza said.

There will also be several characters from the future who will affect Cable's life and a network of business people who have helped him make money to fund his missions.

REDEMPTION FOR THE FUTURE



FABIAN SUMS IT UP

Cable will encounter a varied group of foes during his series first year. He will once again encounter Deadpool; Tolliver will return in a story that will reveal a great deal, and Cable will encounter Sinsear, one of the few people to survive from the future.

A new team of mercenaries who call themselves the Executive Elite will be introduced in the **DEADPOOL** limited series, due out later this year, and will then become nemeses of Cable and the Six-Pack.

"Because the two groups compete for jobs, they mix like oil and water," Nicieza said.

X-NEIGHBORS

The results of "X-Cutioner's Song" have given Cyclops, Marvel Girl, Professor X and the rest of Marvel's mutant heroes a different perspective on Cable. Even though they are unsure who he is, they know he has major ties to them. As a result, they are hesitant to stop him, but they aren't sure they should help him either.

"I see Cable as the troublemaker on the periphery, a sort of ripple effect in the mutant universe. Nobody can get a good gauge on him, and since he's out there on the fringe, he becomes his own boss with his own agenda. This makes it difficult for most of the heroes of the X-universe to determine what they should be doing about this guy," Bob Harras said.

Cable will return to X-Force, the team he led for the last several years, but when he does, he will find a group that may have outgrown him. The children he taught to follow him blindly now have their own ideas and agenda, but Cable still needs them. The question is do they need him?

"It used to be that Cable would order X-Force around. That just won't happen anymore. A boss that has been replaced in the corporation just can't come back and be the boss after he's left," Nicieza said.

Cable will continue to be an ongoing presence in **X-FORCE**, though, and the X-Force characters will also appear in **CABLE**.

WHO NEEDS ENEMIES

"Cable is unlike most of the characters in the X-books in that he is an adult—he's no longer a kid. He's lived three lifetimes compared to the members of X-Force, and may have lived thousands of lifetimes when time travel is considered," Nicieza said. "He's a man who has failed, and having failed, he is desperately trying to insure that the failure never happens again.

"Cable is trying to change the future to redeem himself, but he won't know if his actions are the right ones for years. This causes him to have to make very difficult moral choices, and that's what fascinates me about the character.

"This book is so easy for me to write. When I'm asked what characters will appear in the book's first year, I've got to think who's NOT going to be in the first year. There is so much history and richness to the character of Cable that you have to figure out what you can do, not what you can't do.

"When you're writing as much as I've been writing lately you sometimes get overwhelmed. You have to stop and smell the roses. That's kind of the way I feel about this series, its a rose. The whole thing is coming together perfectly. Art's pencils and inks are beautiful and the stories are just begging to be written. Everything clicks. I'm having a great time on this book."

– *Randy Meredith*

EPIC CENTER

—*Paula C. Foye*

DRAGONLINES

The first of the dramatic new Epic Comics "Heavy Hitters" will be hitting the stands and stores this month.

Created by writer Peter Quinones and artist Ron Lim, it's a mix of ancient Chinese mythology, martial and mystical arts, a hard-edged sci-fi set in 2016, the Year of the Monkey.

In this future world, the Ghost Emperor wants to create a New China, readjust the Dragon Lines of force that encircle the world and make San Francisco the center of his new middle kingdom. The Emperor and his allies, (the Spirit-Boxer, the Empress of the Silkworms, and the Fire Musician) plan to plunge the world into darkness, destroy the Great Wall of China, and unmoor San Francisco from America.

The only thing that stands between the Ghost Emperor and world domination is the newly awakened Monkey King and his assistants, Pigsy and Sandy. Will they be able to stop the maniacal intentions of the monarch? Time will tell the tale of the Emperor.

Editor David Wohl calls this richly developed series "a compelling and intriguing blend of mythology and technology."

LAWDOG

A "Lone Ranger," a "Punisher," traveling through a surreal world in a souped-up jalopy, crossing dimensional planes and realities—who or what is it? **LAWDOG**—another "heavy hitter" coming out at the end of March.

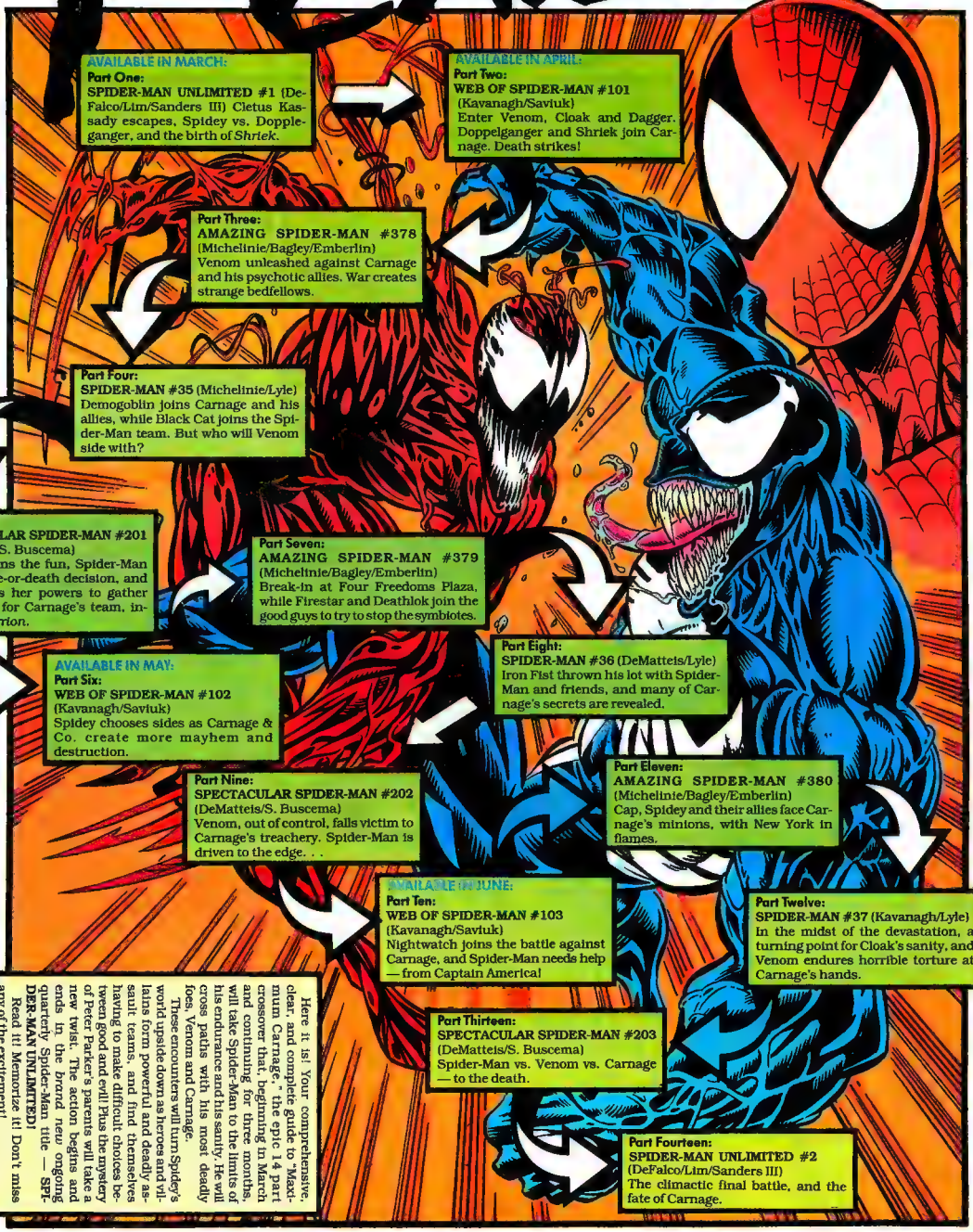
A cursed highway takes this vigilante to hundreds of worlds and he is the only law in this bizarre backdrop, gunning for any villain that dares to disrupt the delicate balance of dimensional realities: be that demons, bikers, or lycanthropes.

Is he human? Possibly. An "altruistic" group of scientists created Lawdog to patrol the dimensional thoroughfares. It's gun-toting, wheel-squealing action from writer Chuck (**PUNISHER**, *Robin*) Dixon and *Grimjack* artist, Flint Henry, who will bring their own warped and fantastic vision to a whole new plane of reality.

The behind-the-scenes story of **DRAGON LINES**, **LAWDOG** and all of the *Heavy Hitters* can be found in **MARVEL PREVIEW '93**, now on sale, and in the special feature article in the next issue of **MARVEL AGE**.

MAXIMUM CARNAGE

A GUIDE TO THE SPIDEY/VENOM/CARNAGE CROSSOVER



AVAILABLE IN MARCH:

Part One:
SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED #1 (DeFalco/Lim/Sanders III) Cletus Kassady escapes, Spidey vs. Doppleganger, and the birth of *Shriek*.

AVAILABLE IN APRIL:

Part Two:
WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #101 (Kavanagh/Saviuk)
Enter Venom, Cloak and Dagger. Doppelganger and Shriek join Carnage. Death strikes!

Part Three:
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #378 (Michelinie/Bagley/Emberlin)
Venom unleashed against Carnage and his psychotic allies. War creates strange bedfellows.

Part Four:
SPIDER-MAN #35 (Michelinie/Lyle)
Demogoblin joins Carnage and his allies, while Black Cat joins the Spider-Man team. But who will Venom side with?

Part Five:
SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #201 (DeMatteis/S. Buscema)
Morbius joins the fun, Spider-Man makes a life-or-death decision, and Shriek uses her powers to gather more allies for Carnage's team, including *Carrion*.

Part Seven:
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #379 (Michelinie/Bagley/Emberlin)
Break-in at Four Freedoms Plaza, while Firestar and Deathlok join the good guys to try to stop the symbiotes.

AVAILABLE IN MAY:

Part Six:
WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #102 (Kavanagh/Saviuk)
Spidey chooses sides as Carnage & Co. create more mayhem and destruction.

Part Eight:
SPIDER-MAN #36 (DeMatteis/Lyle)
Iron Fist thrown his lot with Spider-Man and friends, and many of Carnage's secrets are revealed.

Part Nine:
SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #202 (DeMatteis/S. Buscema)
Venom, out of control, falls victim to Carnage's treachery. Spider-Man is driven to the edge. . .

Part Eleven:
AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #380 (Michelinie/Bagley/Emberlin)
Cap, Spidey and their allies face Carnage's minions, with New York in flames.

AVAILABLE IN JUNE:

Part Ten:
WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #103 (Kavanagh/Saviuk)
Nightwatch joins the battle against Carnage, and Spider-Man needs help — from Captain America!

Part Twelve:
SPIDER-MAN #37 (Kavanagh/Lyle)
In the midst of the devastation, a turning point for Cloak's sanity, and Venom endures horrible torture at Carnage's hands.

Part Thirteen:
SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #203 (DeMatteis/S. Buscema)
Spider-Man vs. Venom vs. Carnage — to the death.

Part Fourteen:
SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED #2 (DeFalco/Lim/Sanders III)
The climactic final battle, and the fate of Carnage.

Here it is! Your comprehensive, clear, and complete guide to "Maximum Carnage," the epic 14 part crossover that, beginning in March and continuing for three months, will take Spider-Man to the limits of his endurance and his sanity. He will cross paths with his most deadly foes, Venom and Carnage.

These encounters will turn Spidey's world upside down as heroes and villains form powerful and deadly assault teams, and find themselves having to make difficult choices between good and evil! Plus the mystery of Peter Parker's parents will take a new twist. The action begins and ends in the *brand new* ongoing quarterly Spider-Man title — **SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED!**

Read it! Memorize it! Don't miss any of the excitement!

(For the story behind the making of "Maximum Carnage," check out **MARVEL PREVIEW '93**, now on sale.)

– *Lia M. Pelosi*

Hot Sheet

Big things are happening — really **BIG**! Events that know no limits! Happenings that only the Gods could conceive! You could say that March is a heavy hitting month of epic proportions! The superlatives are endless, so let's turn up the heat!

A DEBUT WROUGHT WITH CARNAGE

In March, everybody's favorite web slinger has his world shattered when he becomes entangled in the excitement of a titanic three-way battle co-starring Venom and Carnage, beginning in the all-new super-size quarterly series, **SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED**. For some time now, Spider-Man Group Editor Danny Fingeroth has been trying to cajole writer Tom **(THOR)** DeFalco and artist Ron **(INFINITY WAR)** Lim into working on a Spidey title. However, with the already voluminous amount of great work these two put out each month, there is little time in either's schedule to add another monthly book. Thus the creation of a 64-page, four times a year series which will feature a lead story by DeFalco and Lim and additional tales by other popular writers and artists.

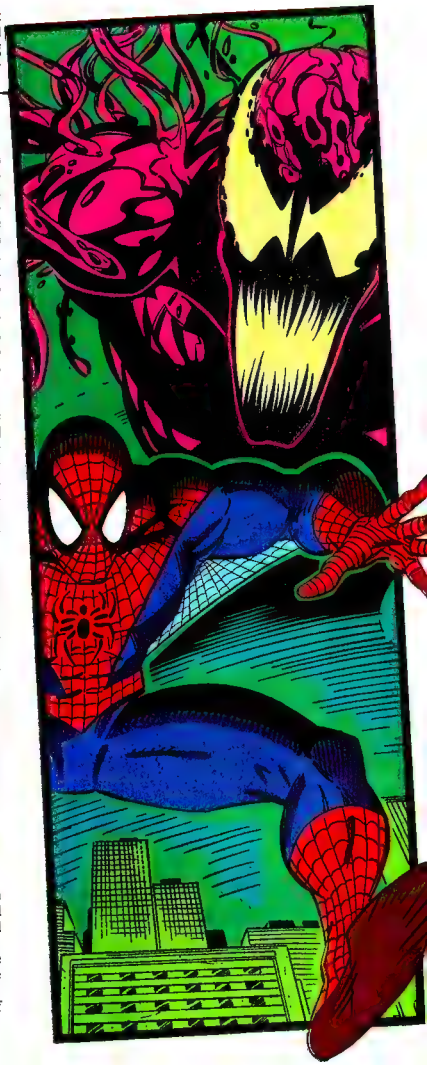
As if the debut of such a deluxe series wasn't enough, Fingeroth — along with the entire **SPIDER-MAN** line creative team (joined by fan-favorite artist Tom [*Robin*] Lyle) — conceived an event so awesome it will take the other three Spidey titles and fourteen parts to tell it. The entire saga begins in **SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED #1** and is called "Maximum Carnage." As the name implies, all heck breaks loose when Spider-Man is forced into the middle of a life and death struggle between Venom and Carnage.

Advance word of the titanic storyline has the comic industry frothing with excitement. "This is the crossover series all of Marvel fandom has been waiting for!" exclaimed Gary Colabuono, owner of *Moondog's Comics* of Illinois. "A full-blown, knock-down conflagration featuring Spidey vs. Venom vs. Carnage!. . .[I] confidently predict that this crossover series is destined to be a hot fan favorite long remembered in the annals of Mighty Marvel."

When talk of the fourteen part story first began, David Torgerson of the *Westfield Comics* subscription service and retail chain noted, "Venom and Carnage are as popular as they come. This crossover is sure to make Spider-Man fans foam at the mouth. The market has not been oversaturated with Carnage appearances, which should make this event even more popular. Fans want more Carnage, and they're sure to get plenty here."

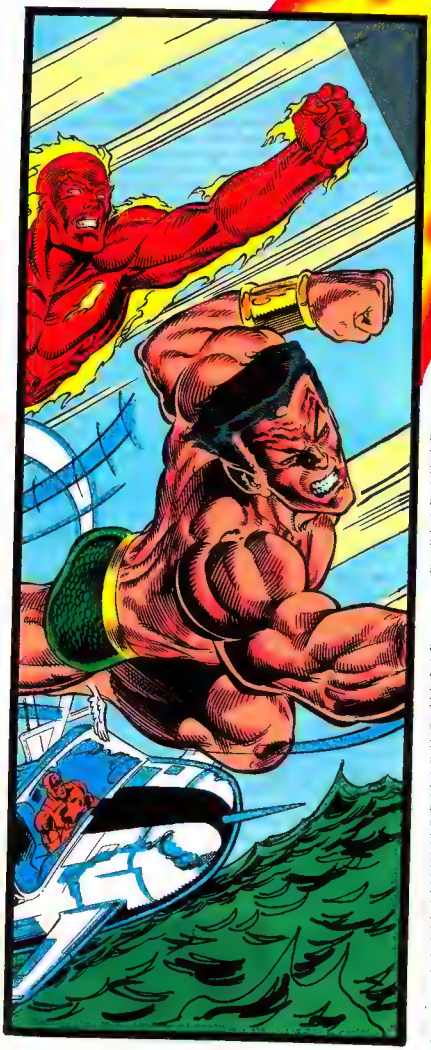
WHAT THE GODS DECREE, LET NO MAN TEAR ASUNDER

For the past several years, Tom DeFalco and Ron Frenz have turned the life of the Asgardian Thunder God inside out. In that time, they've killed Loki, banished Thor, and replaced him with the mortal Eric Masterson. Now, however, they've decided it's time to let someone else meddle in Thor's affairs. Thus, this Spring will see a changing of the guard on THOR as stellar Jim Starlin, Ron Marz, and artist Bruce Zick take over the reins of



that Thor has returned to an anything but dull life in Asgard.

THOR Editor Mike Rockwitz put into perspective the differences between the Thunder God and Thunderstrike. "With all the great work DeFalco and Frenz have done on **THOR**, I anxiously await the first issue of **THUNDERSTRIKE**. It will be interesting to see how they craft stories for a truly Earthbound Asgardian-created character."



Steve Snyder, owner of Ohio's *Central City Comics*, also focused his anticipation on how the creative team will handle the differences. "Now that the real Thor has returned, Eric Masterson moves into his own book. It's nice to know that many of the characters we've come to know in Eric's slice of the universe will continue to be a part of his adventures, and that Thunderstrike himself will continue to be a major power in the Marvel Universe." Brian Schur, owner of Nebraska-based *Cosmic Comics*, also agrees that it is Masterson's humanness which sets him apart from his Asgardian benefactors. "This new title has everything a Thor fan could want! Following in the footsteps of Beta Ray Bill, and old Blondie himself, this new hero will have the might to fight the menaces of Earth, but he will have the humanity of a mere mortal coupled with the power of the Thunder God."

FUTURE SHOCK

Mutants are all the rage, this year and every year. However, recently one mutant has been more on readers' minds than most others — the hard-hitting hero called Cable. Last Winter's **"X-Cutioner's Song"** prominently featured Cable, but the crossover actually brought up as many questions concerning this mysterious mutant as it answered. Well, fear not X-philes, answers are forthcoming in the new monthly series, **CABLE**. Writer Fabian Nicieza and artist Art Thibert plan to give us new insights, and along the way we'll see old friends, new villains, and gut-searing action. Just what everyone wants, according to David Torgerson. "Cable in his own series? For **X-FORCE** fans, this is a dream come true. It's nice to see fans' wishes being answered with a regular series."

Steve Snyder of Ohio-based *Central City Comics* agreed, and is glad to see that the scope of the new series will not be limited to Cable's adventures in the here and now. "Cable. Weapon X. Six Pack. Villains from the future. Nemeses from the past. This series is so full of characters that Fabian and Art will have stories for the next ten years at least. The first issue glimpses into Cable's past (future?) are truly tantalizing. This book will be a big hit, not just because it's Cable, but because it's darn good."

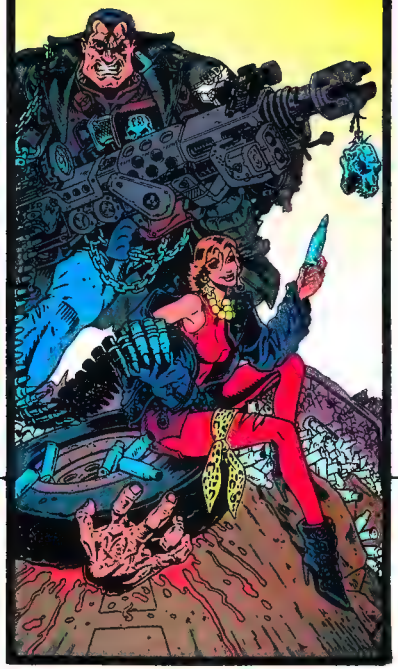
BLAST FROM THE PAST

Speaking of time out of sequence, Marvel fans will get a glimpse of the Marvel Universe's explosive history in the four-issue series **THE INVADERS**, written by Roy Thomas with art by Dave Hoover and Bryan Garvey. **THE INVADERS** will feature an all-out action story set during World War II, filled with Nazi villains and classic heroes. Gary Colabuono feels **THE INVADERS** are just the ticket for a trip down a new memory lane. "Hey, anytime I see a comic book that features Captain America and Namor teamed up, sockin' 'Nazi Rats' I just gotta smile. The history of Marvel contains many top-drawer adventure stories starring the full line-up of WWII super heroes! Can the House of Ideas repeat the glory of yesteryear? How can you even contemplate anything less than genuine greatness when the Master of Implanted Continuity Roy Thomas is at the helm? My hunch is that **THE INVADERS** will captivate a new generation of fans with the colorful delights of the fighting '40's. The powerful pencils of Dave Hoover present the action in a modern style that should catch the eager eyes of today's fans. It's a fascinating creator collaboration well worth keeping an eye on!"

LET LOOSE THE DOG OF LAW

1993 will see Epic Comics pushing the envelope of comic creation even further with the new "Heavy Hit-

"LAWDOG is Chuck Dixon and Flint Henry at their SICKEST."



ters" line of titles, full of two-fisted action and heart-stopping excitement.

The first "Hitter" to reach the stands is **LAWDOG**, the tough minded creation of Chuck **(PUNISHER WAR ZONE)** Dixon and Flint *(Grimjack)* Henry. **LAWDOG** follows the adventures of a rough and tumble cop assigned to keep order along the Interdimensional Terminus, a crossroads where an infinite number of time lines, dimensions, and realities intertwine. The series is filled with gritty action, leatherclad alien biker gangs, and psychotic maggot-beast worshippers. Just the sort of things that make any hero reach for the heavy artillery.

Marvel Editor Fabian Nicieza got a chance to preview **LAWDOG** and was blown away by it. "**LAWDOG** is Chuck Dixon and Flint Henry at their sickest," Nicieza remarked, "and if you're a fan of their work, like I am, then you know that's saying a lot." Art Director for Advertising and Promotions Dana Moreshead, who makes a living by knowing what appeals, was also stunned by **LAWDOG**. "This is mind-numbing; superbly executed! This is not just a comic story or adventure," Moreshead noted, "it's a phenomenon. This is one book that takes full advantage of the no holds barred philosophy behind Heavy Hitters. I honestly think this is Dixon's best work. And no one captures the essence of action/adventure storytelling like Flint Henry."

And to think this is just the beginning of the "Heavy Hitters" line. In the days and months to come there'll be martial arts sagas, film noir vigilantes by Howard Chaykin, Mike Baron's latest gun-toting creation. . .The list goes on and on!

ONE TO GROO ON

There comes a time when a person just can't take any more mayhem, and if you've reached that limit then you can skip Sergio Aragones' and Mark Evanier's new Graphic Novel **THE LIFE OF GROO.** Of course, you'll regret that decision forever, but don't say you weren't warned. For all-out laughs as delivered by a sword swinging barbarian, nothing beats **GROO.** And in **THE LIFE OF GROO,** you'll get a chance to see how this inept scourge of his time became the hilarious would-be conqueror that he is today (even comedies have origin stories).

To be mean, "Hot Sheet" sent out a partial preview of **THE LIFE OF GROO** to our reviewers just to watch them squirm. "AAAAAHHHH!! What are you guys doing?" screamed Mark Minoff of Toronto, Canada's *Silver Snail Comics.* "You only sent the first fifteen pages — not fair, not fair at all. I've been waiting for this book since **THE DEATH OF GROO** came out. **GROO** has consistently been one of my all time favorite comics. I've been a fan of Sergio's work since I was a pup. But this book has got to be it: the origin of Groo. I loved what you guys sent and was totally distressed when I realized that the whole book was not included. . . Not fair." Sorry Mark, you'll have to wait until March like the rest of us.

Actually, there are some Marvel staffers who also just can't wait for **THE LIFE OF GROO.** "I've been waiting for a long time for this," said **G.I. JOE** Editor David Wohl. "**THE DEATH OF GROO** was one of the best Groo stories yet. Seeing these characters as kids will be a real kick!"

So what is everyone waiting for? Get in line early for the best of what's to come. With all of these big events on the horizon, there's no time to waste.

- Jerry A. Novick

EARTH'S MIGHTIEST HEROES

IN THE SUN

--AND YOU CLOWNS AREN'T EVEN MADE OUT OF ADAMANTIUM!
THERE! NOW LET'S SEE WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU LOSE YOUR HEAD!
I DON'T KNOW EITHER, HONEY.
I WISH... FOR BOTH OUR SAKES... THAT I DID... !

They are the black sheep of the Marvel Universe, rebels sanctioned by the U.S. government: a reformed criminal, a mentally unstable scientific genius, an ionized strongman risen from the grave, and a former government agent known for his berserker rages.

They are the **AVENGERS WEST COAST**, and their lineup will become even more volatile with the addition of Darkhawk and War Machine.

Roy Thomas, who holds the record for writing **THE AVENGERS** longer than anyone — more than five years — is the current **AWC** scribe. During his span on **THE AVENGERS**, the readers witnessed the creation of the Vision, the wedding of Yellowjacket and the Wasp, and the epic Kree/Skrull War. Roy continues in his own unique style in **AVENGERS WEST COAST.**

"When someone mentions the Avengers, immediately visions of grandeur appear," he explained. "These are the big kids, 'Earth's Mightiest Heroes,' characters big enough to warrant their own books."

Editor Nel Yomtov took the explanation a step further. **"THE AVENGERS** represents, for older readers, a connection with Marvel's grand past, the past that Stan created," he explained. "It's the fertile ground that everything else came from."

"For modern readers, who are reading titles such as **DARKHAWK** and **GHOST RIDER,"** Nel continued. "The Avengers provide a background to the mythos and history of the Marvel Universe."

But does this definition hold true when one regards the expansion team?

Rebellious Offspring

Although the West Coast team's name is slightly different and their headquarters is nestled on the sunny shores of California, Roy regards the fledgling team no differently than their legendary east coast counterparts. "There shouldn't be a big difference," he explained. "They have the same charter as the East Coast team and also work under the auspices of the United Nations. The only inherent difference is the actual team roster."

"The Avengers were always the only 'official' super hero group," Roy remarked. "None of the other teams are government liaisoned. And now, the team identifies with the UN." Although the Avengers have the backing of the United Nations committee, this status does not come without its limitations. "Being liaisoned or recognized by the government or the UN restricts the team's movement," he continued. "The Fantastic Four are independent and the X-Men are renegades, so they can pretty much do what they want. Even Alpha Flight has joined the ranks of the outlaws somewhat." Roy found this situation particularly ironic when considering the name of the group. "'Avenging' connotes unfettered action. The Avengers always have to explain their actions to the world council."

While both teams are technically part of the same organization, when they are held up for comparison, the differences become obvious.

"It's always seemed as if the Avengers West Coast were thought of as a bunch of characters playing second fiddle to the East Coasters. It's a perception we work hard to dispel," Nel commented.

"They feel like second class citizens," Roy added. "Whenever someone refers to the west coast affiliate, it's the 'West Coast' Avengers, whereas the home team is never referred to as the 'East Coast' Avengers. They're always *the* Avengers."

This issue presents Nel and Roy with unique opportunities. "The onus of being *the* Avengers is not upon our shoulders," Nel explained. "The West Coast Avengers'

unique black sheep status allows us to experiment with new players in a team setting, characters that would otherwise not be considered for a group." Nel cited US Agent as an example. "Here's a guy who does not get along with anyone, and who the other members in the group tend to regard as a 'loose cannon.' Yet Agent is a mainstay of the group. Being able to move characters in and out of the action gives a real strong sense of activity and freshness to the series."

Iron Supplement

As the Avengers' anniversary year begins, the West Coast line-up will include an exciting addition, one which was originally never meant to be. Nel, also the **IRON MAN** editor, explained, "One of the thrilling surprises to come out of the change of creative teams on **IRON MAN**, was the birth of the War Machine. To (**IRON MAN** writer) Len (Kaminski) and me, the War Machine armor, albeit cool, was to be nothing more than yet another suit of armor in Tony Stark's long line over the years. It was simply to be a transitory suit that Rhodey would wear until Tony returned.

"The reaction in the bullpen, as well as the fan reaction, was incredible," Nel continued. "The fan mail on **IRON MAN** became tenfold what it usually was. The acknowledgement to the new suit was overwhelming."

Len planned on dropping the armor once Tony Stark returned, even with the positive fan reaction. "This was one of the only points Len and I ever disagreed on." Nel remarked, "I said, 'No, we cannot get rid of this thing that everyone seems to be responding to. We will have to find another outlet.'" By utilizing the West Coast Avengers, Nel provides the West Coast team with some much needed raw power, a point of concern for Nel since the departure of Wonder Man, and also allows several seeds to be planted for future storylines within the titles.

In the pages of **IRON MAN**, Rhodey is not at all pleased that Stark had not revealed his risky plan to be cryogenically frozen, and feels betrayed. He is also angry that Tony had manipulated him into donning the armor again, something that nearly killed Rhodes in the past. Thus, Rhodey leaves Stark International under very bad terms, taking the War Machine armor with him, and heads for the Avengers West compound.

A stipulation in the Avengers charter forces all members to reveal their identities upon joining, so Rhodes refuses membership at first. Fortunately, that problem is eventually circumvented and the War Machine becomes part of the team. The addition seems to be an ideal move until Tony Stark tries to return to the team with a remote controlled suit of armor. This will lead to a confrontation between the two iron arsenals. "Yeah, hero vs. hero, something never done before," Nel said with a laugh.

Teen Idol

Shortly thereafter, Darkhawk will also be joining the group, but not in an official capacity. "Darkhawk will be a member for a short time, perhaps one or two story arcs," Nel explained. "He will not formally be a member, just a participating one." Nel who also edits **DARKHAWK**, hopes that the addition of Darkhawk will further bolster the team's firepower, serve as a foil for War Machine and bring in younger readers.

"People originally thought Darkhawk was a silly super hero," he explained. "But after two years, he has kept a sizable audience." Nel further revealed that the majority of those fans were younger, in their pre-teens. He had received several letters from fans in their mid-thirties, though, who expressed their love for the character, because the "feel" of DARKHAWK hearkened back to their

days of reading Spider-Man.

Incorporating Darkhawk into the series reveals that "the **AVENGERS WEST COAST** present a problem that other books [except for **WONDER MAN**] do not share," Roy explained. "All the super heroes are on the east coast, so in order to have a guest appearance in the book, you have to give a plausible reason for that character to be out in the first place." Darkhawk's connection with the West Coast will be his friendship with Spider-Woman.

The Lady in Red

The question of leadership has never been much of an issue with the West Coast Avengers, certainly not as prevalent an issue as within the ranks of the New York team. "Hawkeye's been the leader simply because he covets the position so much, and no one else really wants the job," Roy explained. "Normally, a character like Hawkeye would be hard-pressed to be a follower, never mind a leader."

Major changes concerning the Scarlet Witch have been arising within the pages of **DARKHOLD (#6-7)**, stirrings that go back to **AVENGERS #186**, where she was possessed by the demon Cthon. It's revealed in **DARKHOLD** that she was actually not possessed by Cthon, merely exposed to minutest fraction of his (its?) vast, unimaginable power. This exposure enabled Wanda's dark side to manifest itself, an evil side she had always possessed, but kept in check. Her character will continue to evolve in unexpected ways within the pages of **AVENGERS WEST COAST.**

"The Scarlet Witch has always had a huge following," Nel revealed. "Unfortunately, her personality has remained static over the years. Roy and I decided to give her a kick in the butt." Roy agreed, and noted that the tragedies that Wanda has faced, including the loss of her children the erasure of her husband, the Vision's, personality, will now be the basis for renewed strength and resolve. "Wanda finally resolves herself to get on with her life, stand on her own two feet," he elaborated. "It's like Genghis Khan once said, 'Those things that do not kill us, make us stronger."

The increase in the Scarlet Witch's confidence and self-esteem will result in her taking a more responsible role in the team. "She will seek out a new role of authority and control, but in a benevolent manner," Nel said. "She will express a desire to become the team's leader and the others will welcome that. . .well, there may be some repercussions with Hawkeye, but I'll let Roy play with that." The Scarlet Witch will be getting a new costume, which will give her a "sexy," '90's look to enhance her attitude adjustment.

Doctor's Orders

The storyline which actually initiates the aforementioned changes in the Scarlet Witch features the return of one of the Avengers most feared foes, Ultron, after which Nel and Roy plan to bring back Dr. Demonicus and the Pacific Overlords. This adventure will take the group well into the anniversary year.

"The Pacific Overlords was one to the better groups Roy created," Nel remarked. "Readers wanted to see more of them and the repercussions of Dr. Demonicus's creation of the island nation, Pacifica, and his manipulative actions to get acceptance into the U.N. It has been about thirteen months since that storyline, so we decided to follow up on it."

The adventure concerns certain super-villains who escape to Pacifica, seeking political asylum. The creation of Pacifica, it will be revealed, was but a facet of Dr. Demonicus's desire for world domination. He reasons that, if tiny islands such as Hong Kong and Japan can become world powers, so can Pacifica. It seems the Doctor exercises influence over the world council as a result of his possession of a desirable mineral deposit only found on Pacifica, for which certain members of the council would do anything, even allowing Demonicus to join the council. When Demonicus begins to mine his island, though, he awakens an ancient entity, and he needs the West Coast Avengers help to destroy it.

The Pacifica Saga will set up a scenario allowing Roy to explore a different side of US Agent. "The Agent has always been the type of character that readers love to hate," Roy explained. "He is basically a human fighting machine like Captain America, but stripped of Cap's moral standards."

Less Is More

By this point, the team's roster will have been reduced to five members: Hawkeye, Scarlet Witch, US Agent, War Machine and Spider-Woman. Both Nel and Roy look forward to a reduced roster, citing the difficulty in character development when there is an abundance of players to work with.

"One of the daunting things about editing any team book," Nel explained, "is the lack of space you have to develop the cast you are working with. When we already had seven members, we brought in Living Lightning. He had potential to be a great character but, initially, he was not as popular as, say a Spider-Woman or Iron Man. As an editor," he continued, "I have to give my readers what they want, which often means concentrating on the older, established characters. We didn't jump on the Living Lightning case quickly enough and as a result one year later, the character was nowhere. He simply wasn't strong enough." Thus, Living Lightning is no longer with the group, as he has gone back to school.

Mockingbird will return, although not in an official capacity. Roy felt the reasons for the temporary split-up of Mockingbird and Hawkeye were a bit contrived, and noted he finds the Mockingbird/Hawkeye combination most interesting. "Here you have this former **SHIELD** operative, who is also a brainy biologist in love with a trick-shooting carny actor."

Developments within **AVENGERS WEST COAST** will, as always, be intertwined with those in associated titles, Nel explained: "You always have to be aware of what is going on in the core books, too. Sometimes this limits you, because I may want to do something with a character but cannot, because that particular character's actions in his own book are restraining."

Nel cites the recent developments in **WONDER MAN** as an example. "[Editor] Fabian Nicieza is going ahead with some ground breaking storylines and I want to tie in with him as closely as I can, while also setting myself up in other areas that I have to attend to in **AVENGERS WEST COAST.** Sometimes things just simply slip by," Nel continued. "If I have something important going on when he does and they don't relate, then we've missed the boat."

"In the pages of **WONDER MAN,** Simon had a showdown with the West Coast Avengers," he continued. "The tension between Simon and the team was only slightly alluded to in the **AWC.** Unfortunately, the coordination of the two books was not perfect and Wonder Man seemed normal in the **WEST COAST AVENGERS** while, in the same month, he was doing battle with them (in his own title).

"You have to have balance," Nel concluded. "When you can achieve a perfect sense of harmony, then the most interesting aspect of any book is the relationships. The battles become incidental. People are constantly writing in to tell me that the coolest thing about **AVENGERS WEST COAST** is the little stuff underneath that says more about the characters than any major confrontation they may face."

– Steve Vrattos

PERSONAL APPEARANCE CARDS:

A WHOLE NEW GAME

Wherever Spidey goes, he leaves behind . . . trading cards.

Trading cards? What happened to the webs, the Spidey tracers, and the saved lives? Whose idea was this, anyway?

Comic book fans won't have to stand by and watch as Mary Jane, the Hobgoblin, and nameless bystanders in the Marvel Universe walk off with colorful souvenirs. Everyone can go and find Spider-Man on his tour of malls, comic conventions, comic book stores and fairs, carrying with him a stack of signable trading cards to give away.

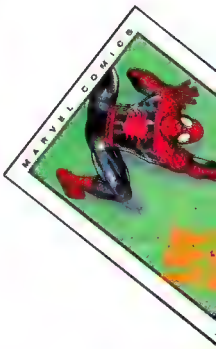
Not only will Spider-Man be giving away his own personal appearance card, but in many places Captain America, the She-Hulk, and Wolverine will also be on tour. These super heroes will be giving away the Marvel Universe card, upon which they were all drawn by Alan Davis and Mark Farmer of **EXCALIBUR**. All of these tours are organized by Marvel's Special Events department, whose director came up with the idea in the first place.

Marvel Special Events Director Alyson Bristol decided that personal appearances needed a new giveaway, and trading cards were a natural choice given their enormous popularity with comic book fans and their collectibility.

Dana noted that the cards themselves were painstakingly drawn by his "good friend, Alan Davis," who agreed to work on them only if Mark Farmer would ink them. Some inkers bring out the best in certain pencilers. Alan and Mark have been working together on **EXCALIBUR** since Alan's return to that mutant title and both feel that they bring out the best in each other, as you can see. Paul Mounts air brush colored the artwork most carefully, and returned them to Dana for his stamp of approval. Dana then proceeded to turn the stunning color art into custom-designed trading cards. Available exclusively through the Personal Appearance Program and produced in limited quantity, these cards were unveiled to the audiences on August 1st.

Alyson noted that the comics fan has two choices when it comes to getting a hold of these cards. First of all, he or she can meander from convention to convention, comic book shop to comic book shop, and hope to run across one these favorite heroes, or he or she might politely suggest to the local comic book store owner that the Marvel Personal Appearance Program is a great way to drum up business, and is available through Marvel Special Events at (212) 696-0808, mentioning, "By the way, did you know that, wherever Spidey goes now, he leaves trading cards behind?"

– *Sonja Ratcliffe*



Tom TALKS

"On to Eric--!"
(or, "Boy, am I Thor!")

Many beginning writers make a fundamental mistake when creating a new character. They've all heard that a well-crafted character tends to take on a life of his or her own. Experienced professionals often say that the deeper you delve into a character, the more you learn about him or her. Characters may even suggest stories and spark ideas which their original creators never intended. Beginners assume that this means you don't have to know all that much about a character before you start writing about him or her.

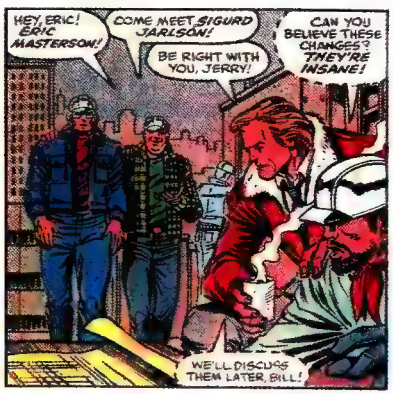
That's a big mistake.

Few people would embark on a plane trip without knowing their destination. And yet, some careless writers routinely toss characters into stories without any idea of their true goals.

"Well-crafted" is the operative expression when it comes to the creation of a character. The creator must know who the character is, what he wants, and where he's going. A reader learns about a character as he or she reads the story. That's a luxury a writer doesn't have. We have to know where the character, and the story, are going so that we can properly structure them.

(On many occasions, a writer will start working on a story without any idea where it's leading. However, once a direction is determined, once a goal is sighted, a true professional always begins the arduous process of rewriting or deleting scenes and character bits until everything reflects the desired theme. Amateurs love everything they write; professionals revise, rewrite, and re-edit until the bitter end.)

Okay, so how does one craft a character? The easiest way for me to explain is to use a character that I know very intimately. His name is Eric Masterson, and he's about to star in the new **THUNDERSTRIKE** title.


HEY, ERIC! ERIC MASTERSON!
COME MEET SIGURD JARLSON!
BE RIGHT WITH YOU, JERRY!
CAN YOU BELIEVE THESE CHANGES? THEY'RE INSANE!
WE'LL DISCUSS THEM LATER, BILL!

(Before I start, I'd like to get a few things straight. First: I may like Eric, you may not. The purpose of this column is to show you some of the thinking that went into his creation. Whether or not he has any merit as a character, is well-crafted, or is a total waste, is for the critics to decide. Second: Eric is largely the result of a joint process between me and my unindicted co-conspirator and long-time collaborator, Ron Frenz. . .with a major helping hand from our editor, Ralph Macchio. while I can recall much of the thinking that went into Eric's creation, I can't quite remember who came up with what. For the sake of this column, let's just say that all of the really good ideas came from Ron and Ralph, and mine were the ones which never saw print.)

When Ralph assigned Ron and me to work on the monthly **THOR** comic, we immediately began discussing the themes and directions we'd like to explore. One theme that immediately leaped out at us was the importance of mankind within the Marvel pantheon. Thor is an immortal, a Norse god of legendary Asgard. And yet he deliberately chooses to spend the majority of his time among men. Why? What is it about humanity that attracts him? Why does he constantly defy his noble father and live among the crime-infested streets of New York when he could be soaring among the gleaming towers of eternal Asgard?

ERIC MASTERSON IS TRULY A MORTAL TO BE ENVIED! HIS SON IS STRONG AND HEALTHY --AND HE POSSESSES ALL THE COMFORTS A MAN COULD DESIRE!
AND YET I SENSE INTENSE PAIN AND ANGUISH IN HIS FUTURE!
WHY? WHY?!

Mankind obviously has a very special place in Thor's heart. A very visual way to show this connection is a human identity.

In the beginning of his career, Thor had a secret identity--Dr. Don Blake. Years later, Don Blake was revealed to have been an artificial identity created by Odin to teach Thor humility. The thunder god eventually discarded this identity.

We could have gone back to the old Don Blake identity, but we already knew that Blake wasn't really human. Besides, why go back when you can go forward?

We decided to try something new. We'd join ol' hammer head with someone who had a past history, someone who had existed, had friends and a family, and a life long before he every met the son of Odin.

Ron's original sketch of the character even gave him a name: Jake Masters. Jake became Eric because it sounded more like a Viking, and I think Masters became Masterson because we didn't want anyone thinking that he was related to the Fantastic

Four's Alicia Masters.

A secret identity should complement the hero as well as stand in contrast against him. Thor is a warrior born. He often battles super villains on the streets of the city, which results in the destruction of quite a few buildings. Eric is an architect. He designs and helps to create many of the buildings which Thor is unintentionally helping to destroy.

Thor is a fighter who was trained to react to problems physically and instinctively. Eric is a thinker who carefully approaches his craft on an intellectual level.

Thor is right handed. Eric is always shown as being left handed.

Thor is constantly defying his father, and trying to break free of his father's control. Eric is a single father who is constantly battling his ex-wife for custody of their son. (Ultimately, Eric loses his son at the same point that Thor realizes that he can no longer avoid doing his father's bidding.)

Once we figured out who Eric was and where he was going, we had to properly introduce him into the series. In **THOR #391**, our hero and the readers met Eric at the exact time Jerry Sapristi introduced him to Sigurd Jarlson, Thor's soon-to-be-former secret identity.

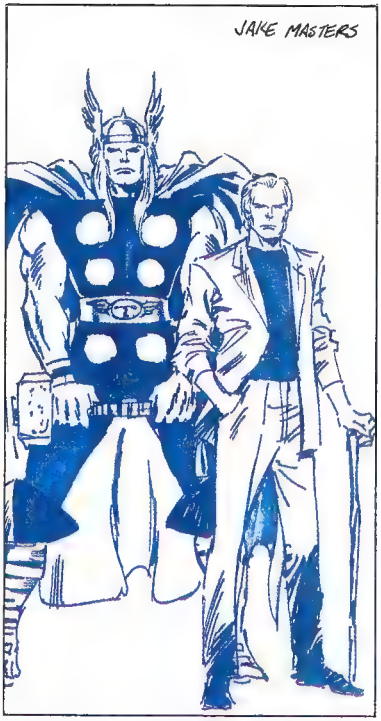
Since we knew that Eric would eventually become Thor's secret identity, he had to do something heroic on his first outing. He instinctively saved Jerry's life, but his leg was severely injured in the process. In the following issue, Sigurd and Jerry visited the recovering Eric. The readers were introduced to his son, to Susan Austin, and to his conflict with Marcy, his ex-wife, over Kevin's custody. Thor sensed tragedy in Eric's life.

He may not have known why, but we did. As the creators of this story, it was our job to craft every thought and action so that they carefully led the readers down our predetermined path. We had to know where the character and the story were going, so that they could be properly structured to achieve our goal. Otherwise, we would have failed our readers, our story, and our character.

(By the way, it was never our intention for Eric to get his own book. We failed to anticipate his popularity. Up until a few months ago, we had other plans for him. Ron and I have already plotted his last appearance.

THUNDERSTRIKE #1 hasn't even hit the comic racks, and we already know *how* his story is destined to end. We know what's going to happen in the last issue of this series. We just don't know *when* it's going to happen, but we've already planted a few clues which will eventually bear fruit.)

Thanks for being there!



– Tom DeFalco

THE BOSSMEN by RICK PARKER

YOU WANTED TO SEE ME, TOM...?
EH-- WHAT'S DAT BOX OVER DERE?
MR. BIG
OH... THOSE ARE THE NEW BOSSMEN PINS WE HAD MADE UP...
...PINS...?
RIGHT! WE'RE GIVIN' AWAY A FREE "BOSSMEN PIN!" TO EVERY FAN WHO WRITES IN ABOUT THE NEW STRIP!
THE BOSSMEN
WE'RE GIVIN' 'EM AWAY?!
TOM... CHILL OUT! YOU'RE A BIG STAR NOW! YOU CAN AFFORD TO BE A LITTLE GENEROUS! THE BOSSMEN STRIP IS...
"BOSSMEN STRIP--?!!"
RIGHT... "BOSSMEN" STRIP.
EHH! I THOUGHT IT WAS DA "BOSSMAN" STRIP!
FOR YOUR PIN WRITE TO:
"THE BOSSMEN" MARVEL COMICS 387 PARK AVE So. N.Y., N.Y. 10016

UNTIL MARVEL AGE GETS A PERMANENT LETTER COLUMN TITLE

MAKE MINE MARVEL!

Send your letters to: MARVEL AGE MAGAZINE, c/o Marvel Comics Group, 387 Park Avenue South, New York, NY 10016.

Attention, correspondents: All letters to be considered for publication must include your complete name and address, though we will gladly withhold that info on request!

This month's letter column title comes to us from David Jolley of West Valley City, UT, and it's one of the first responses to our question about whether we should give this column a permanent title or keep rotating it every month. (As you probably guessed, David voted for the latter.) Thanks a lot, David! As for the rest of you, we're anxious to make a decision, so get your votes in by April 1, 1993! Apropos, eh? While you're at it, why not suggest a title or two?

Back in MARVEL AGE #118, we printed several letters with varying opinions about crossovers. We asked the rest of you what you thought, and a whole bunch of you told us. So we're going to shut up for a while and see what you have to say.

Dear Marvel,

The discussion you presented in issue #118 is an interesting one. It is a point that drives deep into the heart and soul of comics as we know them. I love team-ups. I always have. I used to wish that other media would utilize this wonderful tool the way comics do. Team-ups are definitely part of the reason I read comics.

I do not feel that a super hero accepting help from another person, be they super-powerful of not, makes that hero appear weak. That notion is foolish. Is it not the good that heroes accomplish that is important, as opposed to how many heroes it takes to get the job done? Be it one or one hundred, if the world is saved, then it is saved. I really don't care how many firemen it takes to carry me to safety, as long as I'm saved.

It would be pretty silly and petty of Spider-Man to "go it alone" if Wolverine is there ready and waiting to help him out. If they team up to stop Magneto, it doesn't make them any less powerful or heroic, but it does make them smart and cooperative, two traits that are usually associated with the good guys. The ability to work together is one of the things that keeps the heroes above the selfish and greedy villains. And it is also wise to have a companion in case a bad guy should get the drop on you. No one doubts that Thor is powerful, yet he has benefited from the help of the Avengers time and time again. No one is all-powerful, and everyone can use a hand from time to time.

The Fantastic Four are even formidable individually, but together they are even more so. If teammates make a villain easier to beat and also make it easier to save lives, then what is wrong with that? Ulysses traveled with others, and so did Hercules. Robin Hood had his merry men and King Arthur had the knights of the Round Table. All these heroes have endured the test of time and no one questions how "powerful" they are. What we enjoy are the tales of their deeds and the camaraderie they share.

Another great thing about team-ups is that we get to see the contrasts between the characters' personalities. The humor of Spidey vs. the stern Captain America, the grim Ghost Rider against soulful Daredevil, and the berserker Wolverine tempered by a horde of bleeding-heart mutants. Yes, I love team-ups and the good lesson of cooperation they provide. It should never be considered a sign of weakness to accept the hand of another.

Michael McClelland
6010 Glenview Ct.
Fort Smith, AR 72901

Dear Marvel,

For many years, I have enjoyed collecting Marvel comic books and related items. I began with **THE MICRONAUTS** in the early '80's, and like many others of my generation, I've grown with **SPIDER-MAN**, **THE**

AVENGERS, and **THE X-MEN**. Until the past few years, I have had little criticism of any facet of the Marvel experience. However, I have become somewhat disillusioned by certain recent developments.

I remember when a crossover was a special event. **SECRET WARS** left me breathless with its magnitude. Today, such crossovers are commonplace. Why, **MARVEL AGE #116** touts "the Fall crossover" as if such an event was a regular seasonal occurrence. When the **AVENGERS WEST COAST ANNUAL** first crossed over with the **AVENGERS ANNUAL**, readers witnessed an innovative idea that helped reinforce the continuity of two already-strongly-interconnected titles. Now, readers are "thrilled" each summer by annuals featuring titles whose connections are dubious at best.

These rampant crossovers cause a variety of problems. First, the crossovers strain an already-tenuous Marvel continuity. Second, and more importantly, these crossovers sometimes place an unnecessary financial burden on readers. Though I understand the need to charge $1.25 for each issue, I have trouble justifying buying **THE X-MEN**, **WOLVERINE**, **X-FORCE**, **X-FACTOR**, **MARVEL PRESENTS**, some limited series, and any number of other crossover issues merely so that I have a chance of understanding **THE UNCANNY X-MEN**.

I really enjoy your comics and I doubt that anything will change that. I just felt the need to make my opinion heard. Thank you for your time, and Make Mine Marvel!

Duane A. Stewart
Eliot House, Box #77
Harvard College
Cambridge, MA 02138

Dear Marvel,

The Letters of the Month in issue #118 addressed an issue I wholeheartedly disapprove of: crossover exploitation. You have turned the concept of pointless (or mildly pointless), commercially minded crossovers into an art form. Are there too many crossovers out there, you ask? Yes, there sure are. Examples of these are many—if not all—of the Ghost Rider [guest] appearances, **FANTASTIC FOUR #347-349**, any Venom appearance in a non-Spidey book, "The Infinity War" (any characters not related to Thanos or the Infinity Watch were useless to the story), and my favorites, the everyday appearances of Marvel superstars in many of the new Marvel U.K. books. The publishers of those books may argue that this is only done to firmly base them in your universe, but I think they're insecure about their fan appeal—and market share—and use all of those big guns to boost sales.

Multiple-book crossovers are quite good if they have a good story. "The X-Tinction Agenda," "Inferno," and "The X-cutioner's Song" are good examples (but it ticks me off that Excalibur never joins the fun—why?) "The Infinity War" showed promise during the first few issues, but the story lost credibility and appeal around the middle.

Yes, I like Wolverine, Ghost Rider, and the Punisher, but their continuous overexposure has diminished them. Even crossovers among those three sometimes work and sometimes not. Also, have you ever noticed how few and far between are crossovers between super-teams such as X-Men/Alpha Flight or either of those with the New Warriors or Avengers? Considering the number of such organizations in the Marvel Universe, you'd think they would run into or communicate with each other occasionally.

In closing, the Marvel Universe is a very big place and people will occasionally run into each other. But it shouldn't always be high-profile "stars" meeting low-profile ones or high meeting high. Crossovers like those don't have to happen all of the time.

Raul Acosta
1033 Pinero Ave.
Puerto Nuevo, PR 00920

Dear MARVEL AGE,

As an official **WAM** agent, I'd like to file a complaint. The letters sent in to the "Thwip! Snikt! Bamf!" letter column in **MARVEL AGE #118** were very unreasonable. The first letter basically calls Spider-Man and Wolverine sissies for needing to team up. I'd like to see you beat a psychotic cyborg or defeat a street gang without the help of a couple of great guys like Ghost Rider or Shatterstar. My point is that you couldn't do much better.

And what about the second letter? What's the matter with team-ups? Not only do you get the title character, but you get other great characters, too, which means twice the action. You also get to see how certain characters work with each other. Take the "Sinister Six" by Erik Larsen. Not only do we get great Spidey action, but Erik also gives other characters.

Like the part when Solo mistakes Spidey for Doc Ock. How could this happen if it weren't for team-ups? I'd like to congratulate Erik and the staff of other team-ups for adding variety to my reading.

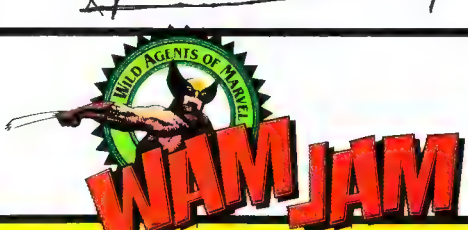
Jordan Demander
P.O. Box 427
Evanstown, NY 82931

We'd like to thank all of our correspondents and apologize for having to edit their letters down a bit in order to fit them all in. This topic elicited some emphatic mail.

We'd also like to apologize to those people whose letters we couldn't print because we ran out of space. For instance, Scott Spears of Hermitage, PA, wrote in to support crossovers and suggested a wide variety of scenarios, from Aunt May dying in battle between the Fantastic Four and the U-Foes to more regular looks at the friendship between Spider-Man and the Human Torch. And Canadian Ben Due of Prince George, BC, was disappointed to learn that the '93 annuals *aren't* featuring crossovers.

So when you come down to it, there's no way to please everyone. As we said back in issue #118, the best solution we've found is to continue to produce periodic crossovers for them what wants 'em. After all, people who like crossovers can't read something that doesn't exist, but anyone who doesn't want to read a crossover can always choose to skip it. Anyway, that's the best answer we've come up with so far.

But before we leave the subject completely, let's address one more crossover-related question in our monthly...



Yup, even among our worldwide network of not-so-secret agents, crossovers appear to have replaced the fall of Communism as a topic of conversation. And remember, if you want to take part in a WAM JAM yourself, all you have to do is include your WAM I.D. number and/or write your letter on official WAM stationery.

Dear MARVEL AGE:

First, I really like your magazine. I would like to ask you a few questions:

1) Are you going to have any crossovers with DC like those little companies do?

2) Are the Marvel 2099 comics (**RAVAGE 2099, SPIDER-MAN 2099**) going to have annuals?

Until Mary Jane goes bald, Make Mine Marvel!

John Aven
(Address withheld by request)

A bald MJ, eh, John? Seems to us her TV producer might have something to say about that. But anyway, here are the answers to your questions:

1) Actually, we already have! Two team-ups between Spider-Man and Superman (one of which included Wonder Woman and the Hulk), as well as crossovers featuring the Hulk and Batman and the X-Men and the Teen Titans, have all been collected in the CROSSOVER CLASSICS trade paperback. And we'll just have to see what the future has to offer.

2) Sorry to say, there aren't any plans for Marvel 2099 annuals this year. But if enough people write in requesting annuals, maybe we'll see some in *(ahem)* the future.

And on that forward-looking note, it's time we wrapped things up for another month. See you next time, when we begin a gala 16-part crossover with all of Marvel's other letter columns!

Scared you, didn't we?

checklist

SPIDER-MAN CELEBRATION

VENOM - DEATHTRAP: THE VAULT 6.95
A new edition - Avengers vs. Venom.

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #200 2.95
48-page special featuring a holo-grafx web pattern cover.

SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED #1 3.95
Beginning the 14 part "Maximum Carnage."

SPIDER-MAN: VENOM RETURNS 12.95
Re-presenting AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #331-333 & 344-347.

WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #100 2.95
This 48-pager features a special holo-grafx web cover.

PREMIERES

CABLE #1 3.50
With a foil embossed cover.

DRAGON LINES #1 (of 4) 2.50
An embossed metallic trk cover spotlights this Heavy Hitter

INVADERS #1 (of 4) 1.75
Reuniting Capt. America, Namor and the Human Torch.

LAWDOG #1 2.50
Part cop, part demon hunter, all embossed cover.

MAD DOG #1 (of 6) 1.25
Based on the character featured in the the hit CBS-TV show, Bob.

METEOR MAN #1 (of 6) 1.25
Continuing the adventures of the film hero.

THE SAM & MAX SHOW #1 (of 3) 2.95
The return of the homicidal Rabbit & Dog detective duo.

SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED #1 3.95
Beginning the deluxe quarterly series

GUEST APPEARANCES

CAPTAIN AMERICA #415 1.25
Ka-Zar

DARKHAWK #27 1.25
New Warriors

DEATHLOK #23 1.75
Black Panther

GHOST RIDER #37 1.75
Archangel

HELLSTORM #2 2.00
Dr. Strange

MOTORMOUTH & KILLPOWER #12 1.75
Death's Head

NIGHTSTALKERS #7 1.75
Ghost Rider

THE REN & STIMPY SHOW #6 1.75
Spider-Man

SUPER SOLDIERS #2 2.50
USAgent

First Week

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #27 2.95

AVENGERS WEST COAST #94 1.25
War Machine, A.K.A. James Rhodes, joins AWC.

CABLE #1 3.50

CAGE #14 1.25

CAPTAIN AMERICA #415 1.25

DAREDEVIL #316 1.25
DD fights subterranean slimeballs in the subways.

DARKHAWK #27 1.25

DARKMAN #2 (of 6) 2.95

MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #127 1.50
Four tales of Ghost Rider / Speedball/Iron Fist & Wolverine.

NAMOR #38 1.25

NIGHTSTALKERS #7 1.75
The Nightstalkers and Ghost Rider battle Stonecold.

NOMAD #13 1.75
Nomad's new girlfriend is hiding a dark secret.

ORIGINAL GHOST RIDER #11 1.75
Guest starring Daimon Hellstrom, the Son of Satan.

THE REN & STIMPY SHOW #6 1.75
Spider-Man battles a punchy Powdered Toastman.

SHE-HULK #51 1.75

SPIDER-MAN 2099 #7 1.25

SPIDER-MAN CLASSICS #2 1.25
Re-presenting AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #1.

UNCANNY X-MEN #300 3.95

WEB OF SPIDER-MAN #100 2.95

LIMITED SERIES

DARKMAN #2 (of 6) 2.95
The deranged Darkman continues his quest for revenge.

THE INCOMPLETE DEATH'S HEAD #5 (of 12) 2.50
Plague Dog attempts to kill DH.

LANCE BARNES: POST NUKE DICK #2 (of 4) 2.50
Lance investigates the murder of a one armed man.

SILVER SURFER/ADAM WARLOCK: RESURRECTION #3 (of 4) 2.50
Shalla Bal's soul is in Mephisto's hands.

TOXIC CRUSADERS #3 (of 4) 1.25
The Crusaders battle an army of mutated monsters.

VENOM: LETHAL PROTECTOR #4 (of 6) 2.95
Spidey & Venom battle a new symbiote!

Second Week

AKIRA TPB #8 16.95

ALPHA FLIGHT #120 2.25

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #377 1.25
Spidey teams-up with Cardiac to fight Styx & Stone.

BARBIE #29 1.25

CAPTAIN AMERICA ANNUAL #12 2.95

DARKHOLD #8 1.75
"Betrayal" part 1 of 3.

DEATH'S HEAD II #6 1.75
The long awaited return of Tuck.

GHOST RIDER #37 1.75
The demonic head of the Firm is revealed.

GUARDIANS OF THE GALAXY #38 1.25
The Guardians join the Galactic Guardians to defeat Dormammu.

INVADERS #1 (of 4) 1.75

KNIGHTS OF PENDRAGON II #11 1.75

LANCE BARNES: POST NUKE DICK #2 (of 4) 2.50

PUNISHER WAR ZONE #15 1.75
"Psychoville" part 4 of 5.

QUASAR #46 1.25
Introducing the stellar heroes, Shock Troop.

RAVAGE 2099 #6 1.25
Ravage undergoes a startling transformation.

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #209 2.25
Part 3 of, "Conan and The Spider God."

SECRET DEFENDERS #3 1.75
Wolverine, Darkhawk, Nomad & Spider-Woman get caught by Macabre.

SILVER SABLE #12 1.25

SLEEPWALKER #24 1.25

WILD THING #2 1.75
Nikki is attacked by a virtual reality version of Venom.

WOLVERINE #69 1.75

WONDER MAN #21 1.25

X-MEN ANNUAL ADVENTURES #7 1.25
Gambit, Jubilee & Storm become enslaved in Genosha.

CROSSOVERS

MyS-TECH WARS:

DARK ANGEL #11 1.75
The X-Men join Angel to fight the evil MyS-Tech Corp.

MYS-TECH WAR #3 (of 4) 1.75
The war heats up as the heroes storm the walls of MyS-Tech.

FOR LOVE NOR MONEY (MERC WARS):

TERROR #11 1.75
Beginning the crossover pitting Terror against Silver Sable and Cage.

Third Week

AVENGERS #362 1.25
The Avengers storm the Gatherer's Citadel.

CONAN #268 1.25
Part 3 of "Conan the Renegade."

DARK ANGEL #11 1.75

DOCTOR WHO #197 4.95

DOOM 2099 #5 1.25
Doom enters cyberspace to confront the furious Fever.

EXCALIBUR #65 1.75
Dark Phoenix threatens the team.

G.I. JOE #136 1.75

GROO THE WANDERER #101 2.25
Groo embarks on an epic journey to a far away land.

INCREDIBLE HULK #405 1.25
Marlo's brothers attempt to gain custody of her.

MAD DOG #1 1.25

MARVEL AGE #124 1.00
Featuring the INFINITY CRUSADE, Epic's Heavy Hitters launch and dual covers by Ron Lim & Joe Kubert.

MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #128 1.50

MARVEL TALES #273 1.25
Peter learns the tragic secrets of MJ's past.

MARVEL MASTERPIECES GALLERY #1 (of 4) 2.95

MORBIUS #9 1.75
Morbius and Dr. Strange vs. Nightmare.

NEW WARRIORS ANNUAL #3 2.95

PUNISHER #78 1.25
"Survive" part 2 of 3.

THE SAM & MAX SHOW #1 (of 3) 2.95

S.H.I.E.L.D. #47 1.75
The last ever issue.

SILVER SURFER/ADAM WARLOCK: RESURRECTION #3 OF 4 2.50

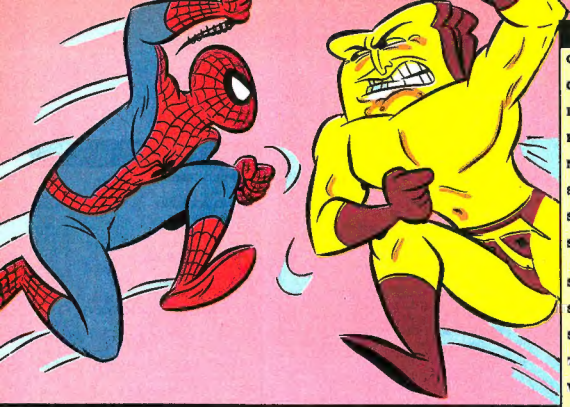
SPIDER-MAN #34 1.75
The thrilling climax to "Vengeance," guest-starring The Punisher.

SUPER SOLDIERS #2 2.50

WARLOCK & THE INFINITY WATCH #16 1.75
The mysterious Shadow Creatures plot to steal the Soul Gem.

WHAT IF #49 1.25
"What if Silver Surfer had kept the Infinity Gauntlet?"

X-FACTOR #90 1.25
Genosha goes to war against neighboring Azria.



MATCHES OF THE MONTH

CAGE #14 1.25
Cage vs. Coldfire

GHOST RIDER #37 1.75
GR vs. the Firm

INCREDIBLE HULK #405 1.25
Hulk vs. Ajax

KNIGHTS OF PENDRAGON II #11 1.75
Union Jack vs. Baron Blood

NAMOR #38 1.25
Namor vs. the Dark King

S.H.I.E.L.D. #47 1.75
Nick Fury vs. Baron Strucker

SHE-HULK #51 1.75
She-Hulk vs. Savage She-Hulk

SILVER SABLE #12 1.25
Wild Pack & the Next Wave vs. the Cyberwarriors

SILVER SURFER #80 1.25
Terrax vs. Morg

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #200 1.25
Spidey vs. Green Goblin

SPIDER-MAN 2099 #7 1.25
Spidey 2099 vs. Vulture 2099

TERROR #11 1.75
Cage and Silver Sable

WOLVERINE #69 1.75
Wolverine vs. Sauron

X-FORCE #22 1.25
X-Force vs. the Externals

X-MEN #20 1.25
Jean Grey vs. Psylocke

Fourth Week

BLACK AXE #2 1.75
BA rescues Sunfire from the Hand.

CONAN SAGA#74 2.25
"Conan and the Sorceror," part 3.

DEATHLOK #23 1.75

VENOM - DEATHTRAP: THE VAULT 6.95

DOCTOR WHO CLASSIC COMICS #5 4.95

DOCTOR WHO 1992 WINTER SPECIAL 4.95
An all-new adventure of a young Dr. Who.

HELLSTORM #2 2.00

THE INCOMPLETE DEATH'S HEAD #5 (of 12) 1.75

LIFE OF GROO GRAPHIC NOVEL 12.95

MARVEL SPOTLIGHT APRIL 1993 Free
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MARVEL SPOTLIGHT "HEAVY HITTERS" #1 Free
Promoting the first two Heavy Hitters.

METEOR MAN #1 (of 6) 1.25

MOTORMOUTH & KILLPOWER #12 1.75

MYS-TECH WAR #3 (of 4) 1.75

NEW WARRIORS #35 1.25
Nova &Turbo take on a team of airborne evil-doers.

PUNISHER 2099 #4 1.25
The Punisher faces the 2099 maffia—the Cyber Nostra.

SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN #200 2.95
Holografx foil cover and the final battle with the Green Goblin.

SPIDER-MAN: VENOM RETURNS 12.95

TOXIC CRUSADERS #3 (of 4) 1.25

WILLIAM SHATNER'S TEK WORLD #9 1.75
Jake desperately seeks evidence that will clear his name.

X-FACTOR ANNUAL #8 2.95

X-FORCE #22 1.25

X-MEN #20 1.25

Fifth Week:

AVENGERS ANNUAL #22 2.95

BARBIE FASHION #29 1.25

DR. STRANGE #53 1.75

DRAGON LINES #1 (of 4) 2.50

FANTASTIC FOUR #376 1.25
Franklin is kidnapped by a familiar fiend from the FF's past.

FANTASTIC FOUR #376 "DIRTBAG SPECIAL" 2.95

IRON MAN #292 1.25
Tony Stark is alive, but everyone wants him dead.

LAWDOG #1 2.50

MARVEL COMICS PRESENTS #129 1.50

MARVEL UNIVERSE HANDBOOK #30 4.95
Including bios of Bishop, Blackout, Dracula, Magik & Longshot.

MOON KNIGHT #50 2.95

THE 'NAM #80 1.75
Part 2 of, "Beginning of the End."

PUNISHER WAR JOURNAL #54 1.75
"Hyper" part 1 of 3.

SILVER SURFER #80 1.25

SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED #1 3.95

SPIRITS OF VENGEANCE #10 1.75
The bloody conclusion to "Carnival of Death."

TERROR INC. #11 1.75
"For Love Nor Money" part 1 of 6.

THOR #462 1.25
Thor faces the new Valkyrie.

VENOM: LETHAL PROTECTOR #4 (of 6) 2.95

WARHEADS #12 1.75
The team fights genetically altered dinosaurs.

X-MEN CLASSIC #83 1.25

ANNUALS

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN ANNUAL #27 2.95
Featuring a new villain, Annex, and the art of Tom Lyle.

AVENGERS ANNUAL #22 2.95
The Avengers battle the deadly new Bloodwraith.

CAPTAIN AMERICA ANNUAL #12 2.95
Introducing Battling Bantam, a new Hispanic super hero.

NEW WARRIORS ANNUAL #3 2.95
The conclusion to "Forces of Darkness, Forces of Light."

X-FACTOR ANNUAL #8 2.95
Presenting Charon—X-Factor's deadlly new foe.

MARCH SPOTLIGHT

AKIRA TPB #8 16.95
Re-presenting AKIRA #22-24.

ALPHA FLIGHT #120 2.25
Polybagged with a superpowers registration poster.

FANTASTIC FOUR #376 "DIRTBAG SPECIAL" 2.95
Polybagged with an issue of Dirt magazine.

G.I. JOE #136 1.75
A trading card and polybag.

LIFE OF GROO GN 12.95
Everything you ever wanted to know about Groo.

MAD DOG #1 1.25
The hero from the BOB television show in his own Marvel series!

MARVEL MASTERPIECES GALLERY #1 (of 4) 2.95
The Jusko Marvel Masterpieces art up close!

MOON KNIGHT #50 2.95
Die-cut cover and Moon Knight before an Avengers tribunal.

SPIDER-MAN UNLIMITED #1 3.95
Beginning the deluxe quarterly series

UNCANNY X-MEN #300 3.95
A 64-page x-travaganza with a holo-grafx foil cover.

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	HAPPY BIRTHDAY TOM ORZECHOWSKI 1	MARK EVANIER 2	 3	LORETTA PENNISE MARGUARITE PETERS 4	MONICA BROWN 5	AL MILGROM KIERON DWYER 6
RUTH RIPLEY 7	JAMES HOSTON 8					
MIKE DECARLO 14	BOB BUDIANSKY VICTOR MARTIN CAREY BROWN OLIVER AURIOL 15	FRANK MAY MARK PACELLA 16	BRIAN MITCHELL BETH BEDOYA VINCE EVANS FLO STEINBERG ST. PATRICK'S DAY 17	BILL REINHOLD 18	 19	DIANA ALBERS 20
AL WILLIAMSON 21	PETER COOPER 22	CHRISTINE AURILIA LINDA VERDUN 23	 24	 25	CORA ZABOLY 26	JOHN TADDEO 27
 28	VAL MAYERIK 29	MATTHEW RAGONE 30	ERICKA MITCHELL 31			

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